

22-65

A LONDON YEAR

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

IN SEARCH OF ENGLAND
IN SEARCH OF SCOTLAND
IN SEARCH OF IRELAND
IN SEARCH OF WALES
THE CALL OF ENGLAND
THE HEART OF LONDON
THE SPELL OF LONDON
THE NIGHTS OF LONDON
LONDON (LITTLE GUIDES)
BLUE DAYS AT SEA

17671

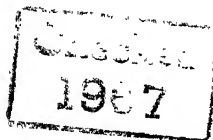
1816

A LONDON YEAR

BY

H. V. MORTON

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS



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MARNIE AND SKEE

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book has been out of print for some time, except in America where it has led a prosperous but furtive existence. I have strenuously refused to reissue it in the country of its birth because it seemed to me to voice a delight in the gaieties of London life now, alas, quite out of touch with our times. It was written during that brief waltz of wealth after the War by one who gazed on the events of a London year with the bright and perhaps too eager eyes of a *débutante*. Now, however, I have been persuaded to bring out a new edition ; and I do so in the belief that if these good times do not return, this record of the Season may achieve something of an archaeological interest.

The London Season is a fascinating subject for a book, but, strangely enough, nothing has been written about its origin and development. It is a legacy which we have inherited from an age of wealth and privilege, and, like many of our aristocratic traditions, it has received the support of democracy, which possibly accounts for its stubborn vitality. The Season begins in May with the opening of the Royal Academy, and it ends in July with Goodwood. During those three months daughters are launched on social life and produced in the marriage market, while those people with the means to do so fulfill a well-trodden path that leads them at various times to Covent Garden, Epsom, Eton, Ascot, Henley, Lord's and a number of other places. Those who lack the means to play parts in the Season form the audience, which costs them nothing. You can, for example, see more of the Royal Enclosure at Ascot from the free side of the heath.

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The London Season revolves round the Royal Courts. Although this period is supposed to begin with the Academy it does not become convincing until the King and Queen hold their first State function. But what is the Season, and how did it begin? Few people, I imagine, could answer this question, and there is nothing to help them in the reference libraries.

It began, of course, with women. In the reign of Charles I a number of wives became bored with country life. They persuaded their husbands to take coach to London. They put on their best clothes and walked in Hyde Park, making, one imagines, uncompromising remarks about one another. That was a splendid and prophetic start to the London season ; but it failed ! In Stuart days there was no West End of London. The English gentleman, incredible as it may seem, had not been invented. (He was a creation of the wars and snobbery of the following century.) In Charles's time the gates of the City of London were shut each night, and at the western end of the Strand was the village of Charing, beyond which were fields and ditches rising to Piccadilly and the site of the May fair-ground.

When Charles and his fatherly Government heard that women were wandering about Hyde Park wasting their time and money, orders were given that they were to return at once to their country houses. Those who lingered were fined by the Star Chamber and packed off home.

The Court of France persuaded its nobles to take part in the life of the capital by encouraging them to live for a while each year in Versailles or Paris. That system ended in the Revolution. The

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English theory held that country life was a whole-time job, as indeed it was, because in ancient times the landed proprietor administered justice and the poor law, and was, generally speaking, an unpaid State official. What the Government said in effect to these pioneers of the London Season was :

‘Go back and get on with your work.’

An enormous change in social habits occurred when Charles II was restored to the throne. He had a reputation for gaiety which must have been welcome after the prolonged weariness of the Puritan Commonwealth, a period of repression whose full horror can be only dimly imagined from its survival, the British Sunday. At the Restoration, therefore, thousands of noblemen and country squires came up to London to watch the King ‘enjoy his own again’. Some of them, I suppose, enjoyed the sight so much that they never went home.

Then London was destroyed by the Great Fire. The new city began to spread out to the west. This expansion went on during the following reigns. Then came the Georgian age and the definite split between the City and the West End. The gentleman of fashion appeared, tapping along St. James’-street with an ebony cane. His grandfather had been proud to enter business, but the ‘gentleman’ considered a merchant to be a vulgar person. Younger sons no longer stained their hands in commerce. There were plenty of wars in Europe to occupy them.

So an entirely new class grew up within a stone’s-throw of St. James’ Palace. There were coffee houses, theatres, routs, pleasure gardens. Everybody knew everybody within the narrow limits of

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the 'west-end'. It was the fashion to live in London. Out of this brilliant, idle, amusing society grew the London Season.

Now times have changed. Commerce is no longer a disgrace. No particular splendour surrounds the soldier, and the Navy becomes less and less a career. Men of birth are, like their Elizabethan and Stuart ancestors, glad to be back in the City.

Still, there is a faint Georgian flavour about the Season. There are no routs. But there is Ranelagh. There is no Princess Pocahontas, but there are any number of long-haired curiosities in drawing-rooms; the opera still retains some part of its prestige; Ascot is still, perhaps, a pretty good imitation of affairs which our ancestors managed much better at Vauxhall; and, most significant of all, there are horses.

The horses that come to London from all parts of England to compete in the annual shows give us the clue that we have inherited our social minuet from an age of candle-light.

LONDON

1933

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JANUARY

§ I

IMAGINE that you are in London for a whole year with nothing to do but with enough money to do anything. You will wander in a haphazard way through twelve months, gathering impressions of scenes and ceremonies, places and people. When you feel like it you will follow the crowd ; when the mood takes you, you will slip off alone to watch Cynthia swaying against a punt pole somewhere on the Thames.

You will, of course, go to the Derby, to Ascot, to the Royal Tournament, to Lord's, to the incredible tea-parties of dear Lady Maud ; you will linger over the rails of the Row on gold May mornings, and, at the correct time, you will obey the Lord Chamberlain's gilt-edged command to meet the King in his garden at Buckingham Palace.

When other people with your imaginary leisure have left London in mid-July to bore themselves politely in Scotland or on the Riviera, you will have a delicious time climbing to the Dome of St. Paul's with men from the Middle West, whose lovely daughters inspire the world's best tooth-paste advertisements. You will go to the Tower of London where you will exchange 'bromides' with natives of New York, Manchester, Chicago and Edinburgh. If it is hot in August, as it sometimes is, you will visit the Zoo Aquarium to envy those cold fish with gold-rimmed eyes ; to watch in cool delight the frigid ballet of the accordion-pleated lemon soles. On rich autumnal afternoons you will observe poor families, who never leave London

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from year's end to year's end, taking a cricketing holiday on the overworked grass of Hyde Park. You will, in short, drift, or wander idly, through a London Year.

However, before you go to Court, before you breakfast in Kensington Gardens, before you lie in a punt at Henley watching that thin gold bracelet slip up and down a bare arm as Cynthia swings the pole, you must endure January, February and March. This is not nice for you ; but it is inevitable.

London earns Spring, she heartily deserves Summer, and, although it is good now and then to cheat the calendar and fly South to the mimosa, returning in April when the London Year has thrashed its way through the uneasy fevers of adolescence, you do not in this way enjoy to the full, as a Londoner should, the first green leaf that brings its message of hope to the greyness of Piccadilly. It is only by trial and tribulation that joys are cast into relief ; therefore, with the grim resolve to see you on your knees before a May morning, I intend to drag you through the rains of January, the belated snows of February and the tearing winds of March.

To the lover of London no month can be dull. It may be unpleasant but it cannot be devoid of its own peculiar individuality. The rain of January is part of the London pageant. The cold winds that sweep the city ; the damp mists ; the dripping nights ; the cheerless, chill dawns, with a blown-out storm exhausted in a sullen sky : all these help us to place London in its true geographical position in northern seas. How much London owes to her Januaries is a fruitful, but unexplored, subject.

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When the discovery of the Americas gave England a sudden strategical importance as the Venice of a new commercial era, how vastly different might have been our subsequent history had London, de-energized by sun, enjoyed the climate of a Barcelona !

She has been baptized in rain, her character forged in fog. It may even be that January, February and March are the most important factors in her development !. Men, who grimly to this day resist the softness of centralized heat and have century after century cheerfully endured the London winter, must obviously be hoarded by Destiny for some great thing. . . .

Now, your mackintosh ! January waits. . . .

§ 2

RAIN. . . .

A damp newspaper boy runs down the Strand with a soggy contents bill : 'Liner's S.O.S. in Atlantic.' London, head down, buffets this same Atlantic gale. The wind comes in great gusts ; the rain falls obliquely with magnificent enthusiasm.

In most cities rain is a temporary unpleasantness and seems no other : in London the rains of January achieve a grim effect of permanence. As you go on through the deluge over glassy pavements you wonder if it will ever cease ; if it can be true that above the low-hung greyness the sun that shines on Africa is gold and warm. Along the Strand moves the wet, sad traffic : carters crouched above damp horses, their heads in shawls of sacking ; omnibus drivers with the water glistening on their

tingling cheeks ; taxicab drivers who say, as they excavate change from the remote undergarment in which they all secrete it :

‘ Blinkin’ awful, ain’t it, sir ? Lots more to come down, too ! ’

Lots more ; oceans more !

In the shop doorway where hurriedly you seek safety from a sudden passionate outburst is a young girl whose silk stockings are black with rain to the knee. She lifts a thin little shoe and ruefully regards the damage of a January afternoon. Next to her a young man shakes a thin rivulet of water from the brim of a shapeless felt hat. The rain falls, making, in the roadway, water pennies which you watch in miserable fascination as they fall and vanish.

High above the City, St. Paul’s lifts its Georgian solemnity in a white mist, remote and melancholy. The mist of rain almost hides the dome : it becomes a thin, looming ghost of itself. The Thames at Blackfriars Bridge is a river of tragic grandeur : a great subject for a toneless study in grey. The rain makes millions of tiny prickings on the surface of the oily, grey water ; and far off, like a castle in a dream, the white frontage of Somerset House reminds you that the rains of January wash the windward side of our Portland Stone, giving to London that splendid silver greyness against black which is her characteristic glory.

Half-past four ! Tea-time is the best thing in all London during January : not the rich camp-fire brews which typists concoct with electric kettles in the City, but tea at home before an open fire in a room growing dark : a room whose charm and warmth are accentuated by the fury of the storm

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which whistles past the window pane. Happy the man who loves his wife in January, who can rush romantically home in the lash of tempest and achieve a queer little thrill when asked, so foolishly :

‘Darling, are you *very* wet?’

A month for honeymoons, because rain seems to underline the beauties of domestic life. How good it is to see the firelight glitter on a Queen Anne tea service, pulling sudden lights from hidden corners, playing games in the shadows.

In no other city on earth does the toasting of a muffin, or the equally indigestible crumpet, attain an almost religious beauty, as though a man were on his knees with an offering to the spirit of fire and shelter. On the windows the rain-drops chase each other, over the chimneys dances the mad Atlantic wind, and the mind expands as it expands in a mustard bath after a wet run to hounds. (No ; don’t switch the lights on, let the flames flicker over the ceiling !)

If at such a moment you can admire the firelight on a pair of shining silk knees, and discover yourself restrained only by buttered fingers from stroking a neck or patting a cheek, it may seem to you that January in London is one of the most glorious months in the twelve.

§ 3

ONE of the most agreeable things about a London January is that to-morrow may always seem to have been borrowed from March, and occasionally May.

We have such days in January—surprising studies in atmosphere ; days of chill mist that would make

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any other city in Europe a hideous mass of looming brick and stone. London, however, has always something in reserve. That is the secret of her charm. Other cities are obvious—they go out boldly after their lovers, while London just waits to be loved. When you think that she has exhausted all her beauty she, most surprisingly, slips a new charm over you, leaving you enchanted and amazed.

You will on such a day go down to the Thames Embankment and watch a short half-hour of glory, fade into a depressing afternoon.

This half-hour—how can I describe it? The sun, small and the colour of a tangerine, hangs over Blackfriars Bridge in an enormous haze of red-gold mist. The river is high, lapping the stone. To the left the arc of the bridge spans the stream and throbs with traffic, with slow-moving tramcars; to the right the delicious curve of the Embankment swings round into white mist. Waterloo Bridge appears to be cut out of brown paper and pasted against the pale sky. Topping the mist at points along the way to Charing Cross are spires and minarets that on clear days are merely ordinary buildings connected with American visitors and the income tax.

Then there are gulls, lovely white, wheeling birds from the sea. They fly in a gold haze, shrilly crying, falling to the water, their little orange-coloured feet down, then up in the air again, their feet tucked back against their soft bodies, gliding this way and that, now above, now below their fellows, marvelously expert and sure in movement and grace.

A little boy, an old man and a young woman at various points along the Embankment are always feeding the birds with bread thrown from paper

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bags. Wherever you go in London there are people who look as though they could not feed themselves, but always they have food for birds.

You will talk to the old man as he feeds the gulls. Yes, he will say, he often comes to 'his' gulls—at least when his rheumatics allow him. He knows many of them by sight, so he will inform you. When really cold weather comes he will have the happiness of seeing them feed from his hands :

'And there's not many who feed gulls that can say that,' he will remark proudly, 'for they're queer, unaccountable things, as skittish and shy and curious as women.'

You will look at him closely and realize that he is indeed old.

A white squadron wheels around him, almost snatching the bread from his gnarled hand. Suddenly a large gull, swooping into the fray with the assurance of the strong, tears the food from under the tawny beak of a smaller bird. A shrill protest, a swift change in the pattern of the flight, a slight wheel out towards the river, and a return to the parapet of the Embankment.

'Ah, wicked !' the old man says ; 'wicked that was ! Just like human beings, aren't they ? . . . greedy, cruel !'

Then he will take elaborate pains to favour the smaller gulls, throwing his bread with discretion, making the birds catch it in mid-air with a pretty upward move of strong wings and a sudden flinging down of tucked-up legs.

He throws away his paper bag. The food is gone ! The gulls know ; and so they leave him with the callous cruelty of unthinking, wild things. They cannot feel, as you do, that he loved them,

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their struggle, and the sound of their wings ; they cannot know that there was something in his eyes when he fed them which tells you how much he would like to gain their complete confidence, and, perhaps, like another St. Francis, talk to them in a London mist.

FEBRUARY

§ 1

THERE comes a day, often in February, when you awaken to a strange Sunday stillness. What day is it? you ask yourself. Surely it is Wednesday? Then why on earth. . . .

You part the curtains and see that the trees in the square are puffed up with snow, the roads are white, the iron railings are tipped with whiteness an inch high. A white fox-terrier crossing the road seems a dirty yellowish colour. You stand for a moment entranced. It is so still: so silent, stationary as those little snowscapes imprisoned in glass globes which they sell in the Rue de Rivoli and in Bournemouth. It must have fallen overnight. You take down your Robert Bridges for the pleasure of seeing snowflakes fall in words:

When men were all asleep the snow came flying
In large white flakes falling on the city brown,
Stealthily and perpetually settling and loosely lying,
Hushing the latest traffic of the drowsy town. . . .

The 'unaccustomed brightness' is so strange. If your bedroom curtains are of a light material which permits the invasion of the dawn you will, awakening earlier, have seen the white wonder before the postman placed his Crusoe feet upon it and led the way to mire.

You feel a childish desire to be out in it; to see London in ermine; to smile at our bronze heroes on whom the snow visits such indignities. The first soft crunchings of your feet are a delight to you; it is fun to see how the drifts have been

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chased half-way up into corners by the wind ; it is good to watch a breath of wind displace a puff of snow from a burdened branch ; and it is delicious to look back and see your own footsteps.

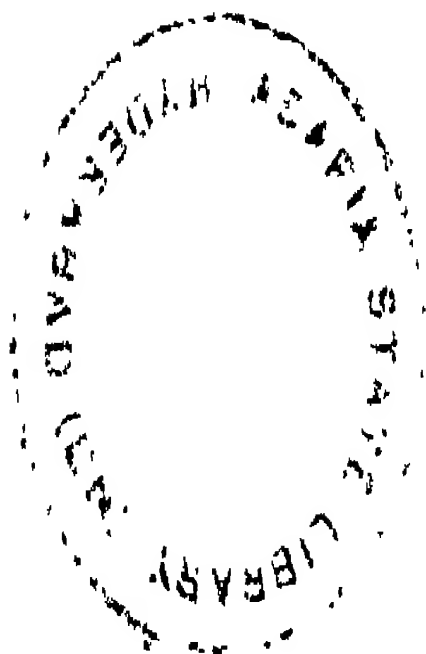
In the Buckingham Palace Road you meet a company of coated Guards marching to Chelsea. How Russian ! And when you reach the Horse Guards Parade it is a little London Kremlin, dome and all.

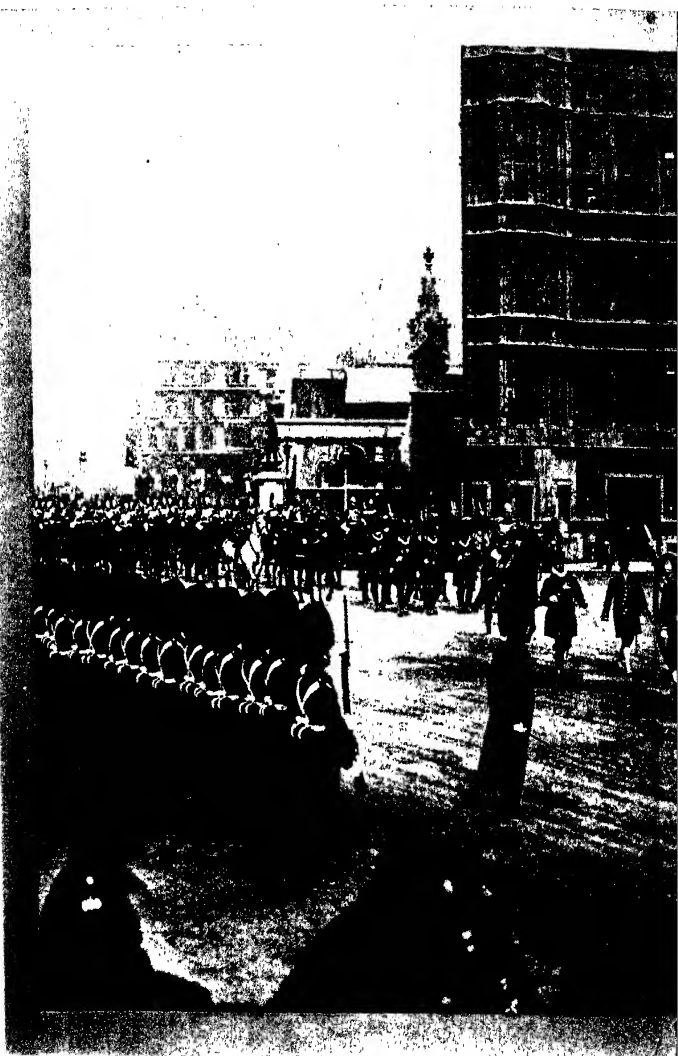
At Charing Cross you meet the horror of slush. The roads are awash in something that looks, and feels, like a brown water ice. As the day advances the wheels turn it into iced cocoa, and it is horrid.

All over London the stone men and the bronze men are holding handfuls of snow most dramatically. Oratorical gestures are ruined by the snow ; the revered heads of soldiers, sailors, prime ministers and poets wear ridiculous little hats of it.

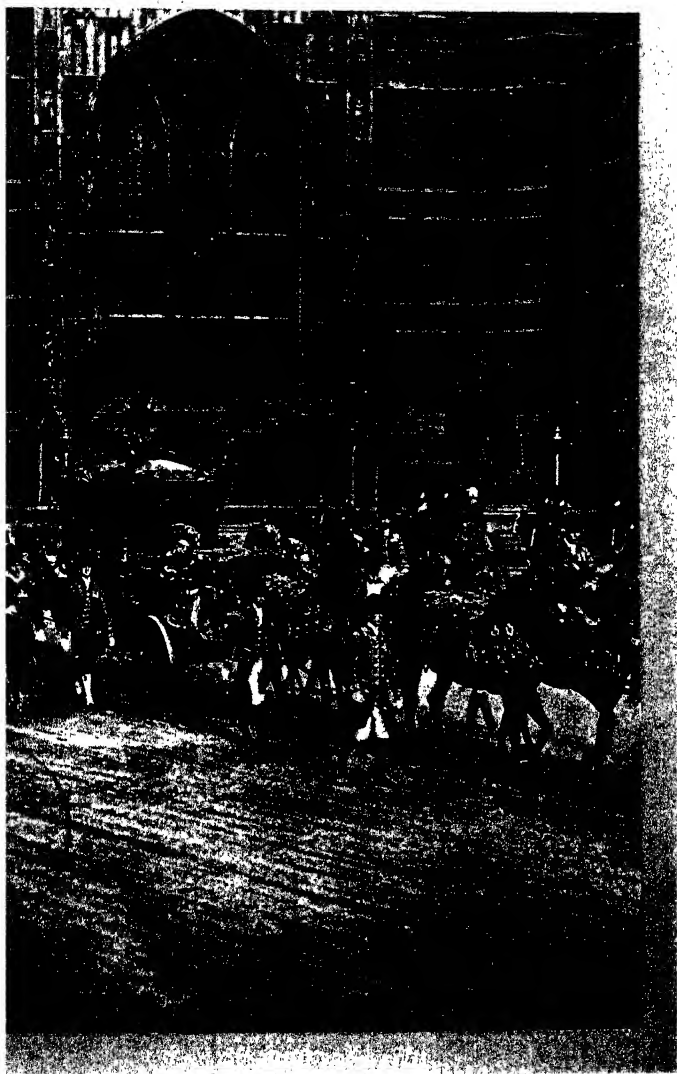
St. Paul's has the ability of withdrawing itself into some remote region of thoughtful mist. It would seem that the snow of Ludgate Hill has formed a thin vapour which has wrapped itself round the cathedral. The roofs are white, the Portland stone spires are dark against this sharpness : London is a queer, foreign city under a dark, heavy sky.

In the evening comes more snow. You will go through the streets to find them powdered, the flakes falling and seeming to rise up steamily from the earth in the mellow radiance of the lamps. Flickering, dancing, this way and that way, they come, cold for a second on your face, soft, soundless, making London supremely beautiful for—one short hour in the early morning !





THE KING OPENS



PARLIAMENT

You will go to the House of Lords to see the most perfect ceremony in the world—the State Opening of Parliament. The streets are crowded. Over the heads of the people are the black bearskins of the Guards. There is a sound of military music and the swish of men flinging red sand over the road. That amazing Cockney-Elizabethan ripeness of temper flashes up from the people from time to time as they beguile the waiting hour by scrutinizing every passing motor-car. An aged peer goes stiffly by, borne down by a weight of glittering honour, and beside him sits his lady, wrapped in ermine.

‘Gi’e us a smile, grandpa!’ cries the lonely humorist of a crowd amid approving laughter. ‘Is that your old woman, her what’s wearing everything but the fireguard? You’ve had a hard life, old boy, haven’t you? . . .’

A Guard’s subaltern removes a fringe of blown bearskin from his eyes with a white glove and turns to find the commentator.

‘I can see you, you little rogue!’ comes the Voice. ‘I can see you under that new ’at o’ yourn!’

I wonder if London crowds have always behaved like this: did that inevitable London voice ring out when the City waited on Henry V after Agincourt? I expect so: it seems part and parcel of the English temper, this friendly chaff. If any one cried ‘Down with the King!’ I know well that the man with the funny voice would be the first to try and land the disloyalist a cut under the jaw. No wonder we puzzle the foreigner!

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At the corner of Horse Guards Avenue the mounted band of the 1st Life Guards is playing a cheerful fox-trot : such a sweet mellow band, with plenty of tum-tumming from the saddle drums that bulge on either side of the plump, piebald drum horse. The band sits its white horses, the drummer puts in a lot of jazz work, the bandmaster waves his baton and there is a syncopated crash. The horses look mildly outraged !

‘ Put on another record, guv’nor ! ’ cries the Voice from the Crowd.

You approach the House of Lords between two lines of waiting troops. Parliament Square is an immense loneliness with its black throng held back by the single line of scarlet. At the doorway you are scrutinized. Your ticket is examined as though it might be a faked bank-note. They cannot be too careful. Now and then they make mistakes. Not so long ago a little bent man carrying an ancient bag arrived at the House of Lords on the morning of the Opening of Parliament. The suspicious eye of the sergeant fell upon him, so he was stopped and the police, gathering round, asked in one voice for his pass :

‘ Pass ? ’ asked the stranger. ‘ And why do I need a pass ? ’

‘ Afraid I can’t let you in without one,’ said the sergeant, with a baleful eye on the bag.

The little old man dropped the bag and fumbled for a card. Then all the police saluted shyly.

‘ I carry my damned robes and things in this,’ said the little man, picking up his bag. ‘ I hate show ! ’

The peer passed. I could tell you his ancient name ; but he might not like it.

But come ; the thing to do is to find your seat and hold it against all comers. If you have never seen the House of Lords your breath will be taken away, for as soon as you enter and look over the gallery to the floor of the Upper Chamber it seems that Time has led you back over the centuries into some old magnificence.

How leisured, how rich, how mellow it is ! The lights are not lit and the daylight, falling through stained glass, gently illuminates the assembly of the peers. They come in by ones and twos in long flowing robes of scarlet and ermine : duke, earl, viscount and baron. You run over their titles and dwell a little on those whose names appear in Shakespeare. Immediately before the two vacant gold thrones under the carved canopy at the extremity of the chamber is the Woolsack, that ample backless seat where mass the judges in ermine cloaks and full, brindle-coloured wigs ; to the right sit the white-robed bishops and to the left the ambassadors to the Court of St. James's in gold-laced coats and coloured sashes, their breasts brilliant with foreign orders. A whisper runs through the House of Lords. Through the open doors at the end of the Chamber stand the Gentlemen of the Bodyguard leaning on tall halberds, the light glittering on gold helmet and steel corselet and pike point. Their tasselled halberds are grasped by hands in big white gauntlets.

But look at the galleries ! There sit the peeresses in Court dress : white shoulders, arms in white kid gloves, at white throats a misty shimmer of pearls and the white fire of diamonds in their hair. They wear cloaks of sable and ermine. As they move little swift darts of colour spring from their jewels.

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The great hall fills to the brim. The peers take their seats. Conversation ceases. A certain tenseness is betrayed by the officials, who can be seen through the open doors at the end of the hall. There comes into the chamber the sound of distant cheering. The climax to this amazing scene is approaching. From the Robing Room comes the Prince of Wales. In his State robes he looks like a fifteenth-century portrait. He bows to the empty throne and takes his place beside it. It is now very quiet in the House of Lords. The suspicion you may have harboured that these medieval knights in their ermine were telling each other amusing stories is set at rest. They sit stiffly waiting for the coming of the King.

Listen ! Far down Whitehall they are playing the National Anthem. Something of the excitement of the thousands outside enters the hall. You hear a rattle of rifle butts, the sound of commands. . . . The big gold coach drawn by eight stallions and guarded on either side by Yeomen must be trundling to the gate.

Boom ! In Hyde Park a battery of the Royal Horse Artillery begins the salute of twenty-one guns. The first salvo shakes the windows ever so slightly and loses itself in the tense air of the House of Lords. It is the signal that their Majesties have arrived ! They are being met beneath the Victoria Tower of the Palace of Westminster by the Great Officers of State whose names read like a fanfare from the fields of chivalry : Bluemantle Pursuivant, Rouge Croix Pursuivant, Windsor Herald, Richmond Herald, Chester Herald, York Herald, Norroy King of Arms, Clarenceux King of Arms, the Lord Privy Seal, the Lord High Chancellor, Garter Principal

King of Arms, the Deputy Earl Marshal, the Lord Great Chamberlain. So they go up the grand staircase to the Robing Rooms, followed by pages, ladies of the bedchamber and the high officials of His Majesty's household, and immediately before them, carried by earls, go the Sword of State and the Cap of Maintenance.

There is a long wait. The Crown Jewels, the ancient symbols of the kingship, are being brought to their Majesties. The King is robing as a Knight of the Garter, the great crimson cloak with the ermine cape is being brought to him, then the sceptre and the Crown.

Suddenly through the hushed hall sounds a fanfare of trumpets, and at the sound of the trumpets every light in the House of Lords springs into life. It is a superb moment ! A ring of fire leaps up in the galleries and stays flickering over the heads of the peeresses ; below in the great hall the scarlet robes take on an added richness, and, precisely at this moment, through the doors at the end of the chamber step the King and the Queen.

With a rustle the peers and the peeresses rise and bow. You have a vision of heralds in quartered tunics and great thigh boots bowing low, forming a lane through which passes this brilliant coming to life of English history . . . the King and the Queen wearing their crowns, hand in hand, moving silently and slowly to their thrones, young pages bearing their trains, little Court swords sticking up through the slits in brocade coats, little neat legs in white silk stockings. The pages swiftly drape the trains. Their Majesties sit upon the gold thrones. The Heralds group themselves on either side. The Lord Great Chamberlain sends the Gentleman Usher

of the Black Rod to summon 'the faithful Commons'.

You stand watching, trying to sort it out, trying to find words to express the feeling that here is summed up in one great wave of colour, one splendid pageant, something sacred at the heart of the nation, something which it is almost sacrilege for a foreigner to see because he might so easily misunderstand. It is the same 'something' that drew the caps from the heads of the crowd outside when the big gold coach went by, something that caught in the throat, something that slips through a net of words. It is something old and English that is renewing itself in this pageant, something that seems to say that yesterday and to-day are linked and become one in the reality of race. It is the kind of feeling that would assail a man if all his family portraits came suddenly to life and he could speak with the dead from whose loins he sprang. . . .

Down below at the Bar of the House of Lords is a furtive shuffle. The 'faithful Commons' gather to hear the speech of the King.

The King rises.

'My relations with Foreign Powers continue to be friendly . . . my Government . . . my Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs . . . my Army . . . my Navy . . . my Empire . . .'

He continues to review current problems in archaic language, and that queer feeling comes again. This is very old, and just as it should be ! It touches something near the roots : it is so dignified, so assured, so beyond any suspicion of mummery, so splendid to be part of. . . .

The voice ceases. There is another rustle of bows. The trumpets call again. It is over !

The diamonds glitter above the blue Riband of the Garter on the Queen's breast, the King turns and offers his hand, the little pages with their slant-wise swords pick up the heavy trains ; and their Majesties, hand in hand as they came, leave the hall in silence. Parliament is opened. . . .

Outside in Palace yard the Yeomen of the Guard in scarlet and gold range themselves, as is their ancient right, on either side the Coronation Coach. The sovereign's escort mounts, the Colour in their centre, the grooms in white wigs and knee breeches and pink coats lead round the eight black stallions and gold wheels crunch the gravel.

The King comes, then the Queen.

With a great crash of drums the waiting band plays the Anthem, the Colours of the Foot Guards dip—Vittoria, Inkerman, Waterloo, Sebastopol, gold letters in the dust—and from the waiting people rises a dull mutter of cheering ; and in their hearts is something that defies analysis.

§ 3

It is the time of year when the Marquis of Hardupp furtively slips a Gainsborough on the market or waves farewell to a set of Chippendale chairs.

No adventure in the history of investment was more profitable than the traffic of our eighteenth-century ancestors in Gainsboroughs, Romneys and Raeburns, and in the furniture of Chippendale, Hepplewhite and Sheraton.

The Court dress of many a modern girl has been paid for by the cold smile of her great-great-great-grandmother ! But come with me to Christie's.

A crowd of men and women sit facing an auc-

tioner. The room is stacked with pictures in ornate gold frames. The next room is piled with furniture designed for the leisurely ease of the eighteenth century. There are vast gold chairs of the kind that Hollywood peers always use, there are lacquer cabinets on gilded legs behind which, one imagines, Charles II may be hiding with Nell Gwyn, there are sombre suites of Queen Anne walnut, there are great arm-chairs of mahogany in which sit the ghosts of fox-hunting squires, there are gloomy four-poster beds designed, so it seems, for murders in lonely country houses.

A constant procession of these intimate things marches sadly through the London season. A visit to the sale rooms of London gives one a vision of thousands of removal vans driving through parks to castles and mansions all over the country. Where do all these treasures come from? Will the supply never end? It is a fascinating yet pathetic sight, for these are relics of a happier, more prosperous and less vulgar England.

'Now, what shall we say for this?' asks the auctioneer. 'Shall we say a hundred guineas?'

A man in a green baize apron heaves an almost beautiful lady on an easel. Somebody's ancestor. She wears a high white wig and an expression of frozen aloofness. She gazes down at the assembly as if daring them to buy her.

There is a moment of reflection, and then a dealer says, in a cynical voice :

'TEN !'

Another man moves his little finger, a third flicks his catalogue, a fourth winks his eye, a fifth lifts his left eyebrow, and quite soon the indignant lady is up to fifty guineas.

when the picture comes up that an inexperienced auctioneer might think she was trying to buy it.

'Now,' says the auctioneer, in a casual voice, 'lot eighty-five. How much for this?'

How astonishing that a thing can mean so much to one person and nothing at all to another!

The auctioneer takes off his glasses and wipes them. There is dead silence. An elderly dealer who has been picking his teeth with a tram-ticket rises clumsily, walks up to the picture, peers at a corner of it and sits down again.

'Come now,' says the auctioneer, in the voice of a school teacher rebuking a backward class, 'how much shall I say?'

'Five bob!' says a coarse voice.

From this point onwards it is only kind not to look at the gentlewoman in reduced circumstances.

With shattering suddenness the heirloom is knocked down for three pounds ten shillings (not even oily guineas), and as the old lady swiftly leaves the auction room one may imagine a bluff, indignant voice from the other world crying:

'My Velazquez! Well, I'll be damned. . . .'

But let us examine something more cheerful. Lord X is selling Lady Beatrice, the second countess, in order that his daughter may go to Court, attend dances, find a husband, and be seen at Ascot looking as though the family was what it was when George I was king.

Lady Beatrice is marvellous. One looks at her and calls her Betty at sight. And she has been dead for more than a hundred and fifty years.

She is so much of her time that the sale room seems suddenly plunged in candle-light. Surely somewhere in the air is a thin tinkle of a harpsichord?

She is a lovely, wicked little thing with white shoulders lifting themselves from a dress of blue velvet, and a little head beautifully set on a slim neck, and eyes pretending to be serious, and one hand deliciously drooping, the other in a riding glove.

One glance at her and you feel you could go straight out and hear the latest Jacobite gossip at the Cocoa Tree. . . .

‘Five hundred and sixty guineas?’ says the auctioneer.

Lady Betty, faintly smiling, looks down at the crowd with mischievous eyes :

‘Is that all?’ she seems to say. ‘Oh, come, sir, come!’

She is her own auctioneer.

‘Five hundred and eighty guineas?’

Bang!

So it happens that a girl who has been dead for over a century and a half can send a modern girl to Court and to Ascot. I imagine from her expression that if she could meet her descendant she would say :

‘My dear, I’m only too happy to do it for you. I had my time—and what a time it was—and you must have yours!’

How often, and how generously, the eighteenth century comes to our rescue.

M A R C H

§ 1

WHEN the lights of London wink and tremble against the windy sky of March you meet M. Panache at the hour of dinner. He is paid, I think, £2,000 a year to be smooth to people who are, or are not, hungry, as the case may be.

He is always leaning towards a lord, or advising an actress to eat snipe in season. When he sees you he gives a delighted start and moves towards you as if you too were a lord, which shows how well he was brought up. You know in your heart that he cannot be as delighted to see you as he pretends to be (no one could), but he has a magnetic persuasion (which explains his £2,000 a year), capable of deceiving you into the temporary belief that you are the one person on earth for whom he has been watching all day. He is, of course, French, and his evening dress is perhaps a trifle too perfect.

‘Ah,’ he says. ‘Good evening!’

Not a remarkable greeting. Yet, somehow, from the mouth of M. Panache, ‘Ah, good evening!’ sounds just like :

‘Once again, sir, are we flattered by your brilliant presence, you who walk in radiance, who shed happiness wherever you may go. Thank you!’

At his back lurk various waiters in every stage of Latin watchfulness, ready at the slightest provocation to leap forward with an unnecessary match.

He gives you a faint feeling of royalty, for everybody is looking at you. So smooth he is. I think he was weaned on furniture cream, for as he goes away you feel that you have been well polished.

MARCH

There comes a day when M. Panache earns his money.

You are sad. You have the vague depression that comes with March ; that awful March madness ! You have eaten nothing all day and you hate the thought of food. You sink down, down, down into an abyss of self-hatred. Life is just a meaningless farce ! What is the good of anything ? How red-faced and fat other people are ; how pleased with themselves ; their loathly faces, smug and laughing, haunt you on either hand. They behave not as fearful visitors to this mysterious foothold in space, but as if they have bought and paid for the freehold of the world. And you have nothing. . . . How the epileptic lights of Piccadilly blink and shake ; how awful are the hard lips of women and the coarse lips of men. . . .

‘ Ah, good evening ! ’ says M. Panache.

‘ It’s no good, Panache, I can’t eat ! I only want to enjoy my misery somewhere and then creep away to die.’

No surprise ! No questions ! M. Panache reacts—as the Americans say—automatically.

‘ I give you a table where no one see you, where you see—everything ! ’ begins Panache. ‘ You are not well. You need care. You allow me to order your dinner. Um ? Yes ? Of course ! Then, first, I make you a little cocktail of my own composition—the Panache. Um ? Yes ? Good ! Come with me. . . .’

The whole thing is a crazy farce, you think. Panache is a good fellow, but he doesn’t understand ; he thinks scarlet fever or meningitis can be cured by caviare.

‘ M’sieu ! ’

Like a priest surrounded by acolytes he comes with his cocktail. You drink to please him. He goes. You wish he would come back, for although he is objectionably happy some subtle emanation from him affects you pleasantly, makes you think that after all you may not be such a contemptible little speck of life as you believe. That is it; he makes you pleased with yourself! His sympathy, too, is like a swimming bath; you can splash about in it.

Then you smile. You have actually laughed! Was it during the oysters, was it with the sole, was it when he insisted on choosing a half-bottle of wine? You wonder! (How much in love are those two over there, the girl in the green gown and that brown-haired boy. You hope they'll be happy. How you wish everybody was happy. . . .)

And why were you recently sad? You can't quite recall. As you half close your eyes in the blue smoke of a cigar you tell yourself that life, besides being real and earnest, holds things to fight for, and things to love and things to believe in. All the colour has rushed back. But how?

'Was your dinner . . . ?' asks Panache, bowing.

'Excellent!'

Outside there is a comfortable surge of life, a good feel of London in the air, a stimulation even in those winking lights. 'Fate cannot harm me; I have dined to-day.' Who said that? Sydney Smith probably.

'Good night,' smiles M. Panache as you leave.

A strange man! In another age he might have been a magician. Perhaps the queerest thing about him is that as he said good night you felt safe and happy, just as you did as a child when your mother

told you that you had not really bumped your head very hard after all. . . .

Curious !

§ 2

OVER London now creeps the first faint promise of Spring ; women talk about new clothes. . . .

The dance band stops, the drummer gives a b-r-r crash on the kettledrums, the lights go down and some one says, in one of those high, cold-storage voices : ‘ My lords, ladies and gentlemen, M. Flair presents the new spring fashions. . . . ’

B-r-r-r crash go the drums once more.

Across the dusk of the dance floor wavers an uncertain searchlight which, after blundering foolishly over the band, giving a second’s publicity to a fat man with his mouth full of *pêche Melba* and revealing the real age of a few women, discovers its quarry—a girl who meanders into the gold pool swaying her hips like a well-conducted odalisque. She is exceedingly Rue de la Paix. Exceedingly ! You can in imagination smell the coffee and bath salts, the scent and the warm bread which is Paris. She is Paris ! Her complexion is due to a groundwork of queer reddish powder and her lips are unnaturally carmine, so clearly drawn, as in raw steak, that you instinctively trace out the real obliterated design of them. Her black evening dress looks as though someone had hurriedly pinned a piece of cloth on her in the bathroom, and when she turns, her back is a large unimaginative white V. So she glides forward prettily, placing her feet delicately, step by step, in the manner of the mountain goat, turning this way and that, her hands

describing airy gracefulnesses in the limelight. You feel that she should sing a song, but, of course, she does not ; for she is that strange thing, a live fashion plate, a mannequin from Paris.

Somewhere in the small, smart dance club—the fashionable theatre for the unveiling of the new mode—M. Flair stands watching critically. How wonderful to be M. Flair ! You look at him and wonder what it feels like to possess the power of creating a new silhouette, to be able to persuade women from Birmingham to Buenos Aires either to hide or reveal their calves. No matter how much an ordinary man is permitted to believe he controls a woman, it is as nothing compared with the real dictatorship of M. Flair ! The interesting thing is that it does not end in this smart dance club ; it merely begins there and goes right down the social scale. To-day's flash of genius will be selling from the peg in High-street, Kensington, before June is old ; and then, of course, M. Flair finds the ice bag and thinks out something else. It must be rather like having a butterfly farm.

How solemn every one becomes. M. Flair looks at each creation as a shipbuilder might anxiously regard his new liner as she ploughs down into the sea at her launching ; the women lean forward critically, either accepting or rejecting each dress in relation to their own appearance, and the men divide their interest between the mannequins as human beings and the small change of inexpert comment, to which their partners pay slight attention.

It is a solemn event. As the girl walks across the floor the appearance of millions of women is being settled for them. The echo of this event will be

heard in Mayfair : ' Jove, you look stunning to-night ! ' in Kensington : ' I say, that's a ripping thing you've got on ! ' and, in time, in Brixton : ' You look an absolute winner, you do ! '

So, you see, it is nothing to laugh at or to sneer at ; it's Her eye M. Flair catches, and—our money ! We are all in this !

Mannequin after mannequin takes the floor. Such self-assurance ! No man, not even a popular actor, could endure this ordeal in cold blood, in so easy, so graceful, so unconcerned a way. But if a woman believes that she is well dressed nothing is impossible to her. One mannequin glides in a cold melancholy, as though she had been frozen at a death-bed ; another smiles vaguely as at some private joke, and all, instead of trying to be real women, create an impersonal atmosphere which leaves you with the impression that some waxen Cytherea has stepped from a shop window.

' My great aunt ! ' remarks Joan, grinding a cigarette stump in a plate. ' Fancy going to a point-to-point in that ! '

M. Flair does not know everything. He always brings over impossible sports clothes, the kind of thing that looks good over the rails of the Bois, but is as different from an Englishwoman's idea of a tweed costume as a provincial Frenchman's riding breeches are different from those worn in the Quorn country. I would take M. Flair on at this game and would beat him hollow. I would, moreover, guarantee to work up any fashion show to a condition of hysterical delight. I would get the tailors of Melton Mowbray or Edinburgh to make a few tweed costumes ; and I would inhabit them with the right striding kind of English girl and, shod in brogues,

with perhaps a couple of adorable Sealyhams at heel, she would knock spots off any odalisque born !

'Tweed—tweed—why do men always love tweed?' women ask.

Perhaps if you excavated our hearts you might find that each one of us has some April memory of a windy day and a smiling girl, hair blowing, cheeks a-tingle, arms full of struggling puppies ; and the clouds wheeling above the hill-top, their shadows like smoke racing across the green patchwork of an English shire. . . .

§ 3

AND now the Boat Race.

For weeks London has read forecasts by 'Old Blues' and tiresome newspaper stories from the tow-path dealing with adoring maidens from Putney, and it now knows by heart the appearance of the light and dark blue crews. Then dawns the day of the Boat Race—the first big sporting event of the year.

You join the rush towards Putney. You work your way into the crowd near Barnes Bridge and there you wait.

The sky is Cambridge blue, the Thames, reflecting it, is Oxford blue ; the sun is actually warm on the back of your neck. Now and then there comes, most unjustly, the sharp lash of a north-east wind. By craning your head you catch a glimpse of the river, broad and gently swelling, receding in the distance to that delightful curve at Corney Reach. You have seen a basket of newly picked blackberries ? Both banks of the river as far as you can see look exactly as if some one has emptied millions

of blackberries there. The Thames flows between two living banks.

As time goes on the pressure of the crowd at your back increases so that, mysteriously, in spite of the fact that you hold your ground with fierce resolve, you begin to lose what little sight of the river you at first possessed. But it is worth it. The crowd is a joy. It is one of the most delicious crowds of the year.

In front is a man who tells his girl that he knows the Oxford cox. Next to him is a man wearing a Southern Railway workman's coat. He has a baby in his arms and owns a submerged wife somewhere to whom he shouts continuously. Sitting on the parapet are two young girls, and next to them a tidy old lady in black, who is wearing a pair of white cotton gloves.

'Dare I?' says the old lady when some one who is with her pushes a cigarette case towards her.

'Oh, go on, mother!'

'Dare I?' repeats the old lady, looking coy. She pushes up her veil and does!

Suddenly the chatter stops. Down Putney way they are cheering. The Barnes crowd takes it up. Opposite, in Duke's Meadows, two clumsy barrels, one a dark blue the other a light, are seen to move upwards towards the mast from which they are suspended.

'They've started!'

All eyes are glued to the barrels on the opposite bank. The light blue barrel rises above the dark. A perfect scream of delight comes from the crowd. Three shop-girls, hand in hand on chairs, dance with joy.

'Good old Cambridge!' they shout.

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Then, far off, at the river's bend, you see something white rising and falling rhythmically. There they are ! Frantic shouting is going on all round. The barrels opposite are forgotten.

'Come on, Cambridge !'

'Ox-FERD ! Ox-FERD !'

How slowly they seem to move ! Now and then the sun catches the water falling from the oars.

'Please do let my little boy get near the front !'

A woman with despair in her voice pulls at your coat. You take the lad and push him in front. He displaces some one and you have a clear view. (A good action rewarded !) Then the vile youth removes his cap, and a tangle of hair leaps up into the air almost a foot high, obscuring everything. You could kill him ! The wind blows it about.

Then, through his hair, you see the race. . . .

Cambridge, well ahead, are tearing through the water, Oxford behind. Some expert says Oxford are 'all in'. You cannot tell. To you it seems that both crews are working like machines. There is an uncanny clockwork precision about them. They pass to a babel of shouting ! Behind them, keeping a splendid line, surges a rank of motor launches, with cinema men turning handles, photographers frantically taking pictures, and bunches of 'Varsity men, hands in coat pockets, eyes glued on the boats ahead. . . .

A minute . . . two minutes . . . pass. And then the word 'Cambridge' comes in a great roar from Mortlake. (Sometimes it is Oxford !) At Barnes they catch the word and hurl it on to Hammer-smith ; at Hammersmith Bridge they send it on to Putney.

M A R C H

On the outskirts of the crowd an Oxford butcher's boy is rolling in the road with a light blue boy who has insulted him.

Up, Oxford ! Up, Cambridge ! Up, the Thames !
So London celebrates its first excitement. . . .

APRIL

§ 1

NOW the London Year awakens. Spring is dancing a minuet through London. Wherever she places a toe a daffodil waves above the grass, where she pirouettes a moment the hyacinths unfold their bells, and in the wind of her flying hair the sticky chestnut buds fling back their green coats.

In Kensington Gardens you will watch middle-aged men sail model yachts. A woman will perhaps say to you, 'Aren't men babies all their lives? Can you imagine grown women behaving like that?' Never! Woman is a solemn, specialized animal. She realizes her toys in life. She rehearses her destiny from her earliest years. A woman's children are her dolls come true, but no man ever played at being a chartered accountant. A man puts aside childish things and becomes a solicitor or an auctioneer. Life sidetracks us in a maddening way, and the Napoleons of the nursery floor forget their lost brigades, their horse, foot, and guns, and go sadly about the world as bishops or K.C.s. So you will sit in Kensington Gardens watching men play at boats, thinking how fortunate they are, how happy they look on this sharp day of yellow April.

'If', says the woman, 'I were married to a man who wanted to play with yachts, I should go mad.'

How gloriously the ships take the water and fill their little sails with wind, leaning across the bosom of the Round Pond, trembling in a cross wind, veering, tacking, going on, dipping like big white birds. . . .

The men who play with boats in Kensington Gardens are instructed by their wives to put on old flannel trousers. One of them, you will notice, wears his ancient British warm. All carry bamboo poles to prod their ships out of difficult situations or to pull them to land in a heartless calm. When the yachts are launched these middle-aged men stride sternly to the other side of the pond to reclaim them, walking swiftly with a loving eye on the waters where the white sails move.

‘Ridiculous!’ says the woman.

You sit there feeling horribly out of it, wishing an old ex-colonel would ask you if you’d like to play. . . .

A dog walks past on good behaviour behind his master. He pauses, his forehead wrinkled in thought. What a singularly luscious duck! He looks at his master and at the duck. One sudden spring. . . . Why is that fat, foolish duck sailing about there anyway if not to be caught, or at least startled? You can see his mind working. A whistle! Off he trots with one lingering wistful glance. How irksome duty can be.

The duck, unaware that the obedience in the heart of a dog has saved him considerable agitation, performs the most ridiculous act in nature. He directs his beak end downwards in the direction of grubs, leaving exposed to the sky a fluffy, triangular stern. Two orange-coloured legs move humorously below water, maintaining balance. For some seconds he remains in this comic position; then, like a cork suddenly released from beneath water, up he pops. No trace of triumph on his face, no hint of lusciousness achieved: just a plain, smug duck.

Light clouds wheel over the Round Pond. A fresh wind whips the waters into a little running gale.

The maze of trees towards Hyde Park shows slight shimmerings of sharp green. One by one, and here and there, three or four in a group, the trees are brought to life at the call of Spring. On the grass at the back hundreds of chairs—ah, sure and certain sign!—are placed, leaning together two by two, as if invisible lovers are tilting them as they embrace regardless of the law of gravity. Such a comedy in chairs! Here two are not leaning like the others: they are back to back. A quarrel? Over there three chairs, very correct and stiff, are placed together. That triangle again. . . .

Children pass; fat, pink children, their small legs at last free from fluffy woollen overalls. They love to run and wave their arms and feel grass beneath their feet. In a small paddock-like enclosure near Kensington Palace a thousand daffodils, like the spears of Oberon's army, leap in golden glory from the turf. . . .

Ah, it is good to be in London on an April morning, with life in the air, the sun coming in bursts, and the great clouds sailing at top speed, big cotton-wool clouds with golden undersides.

You will go down to the city. See Spring come marching into London Town, her green banners high.

In the Temple sparrows are chattering. Almost white buds shine on the trees. From the fountain in Fountain Court springs a thin jet of water, and beside the fountain is surely the first American girl to bring a guide-book to the Temple this year. She wears a plaid coat with a trimming of lambs'

A P R I L

wool, narrow snake-skin shoes, fawn stockings and embroidered gauntlets bought in the Rue de la Paix.

‘Why, isn’t this just lovely?’

Below in Garden Court the borders of hyacinths are out, white and blue, the daffodils are in blossom, and the sharp green of the lawns is a compliment to the grey old buildings on either side. The lawyers pass to and fro and, as the wind and the sun meet them and they see a pretty girl with a guide-book gazing at the fountain, they feel ten years younger and look almost like ordinary harmless men.

Spring dances on . . . in field and city, in head and in heart.

§ 2

WHEN the old men of Chelsea put off their blue tunics and wear scarlet, you know that Spring is official. They live in Wren’s spacious building beside the Thames at Chelsea, a building known as the Royal ‘College’, a title that takes the mind beyond Nell Gwyn, the legendary founder, to that curious man James I, who established there a college for the study of polemical divinity,

If you have not been to Chelsea Hospital and if you have not taken your country relatives there when they have come up to town, you have missed one of London’s most interesting experiences. Americans and architectural societies seem alone in the knowledge that Chelsea Hospital, with its fine hundred wonderful old men, is open to the public every day.

The aged veterans smoke in corners. They are not very sociable. It is wrong to believe, as is

generally supposed, that they fight their battles over again, using matches for brigades. They do not. They have forgotten.

Things that appear important to you at thirty must, at eighty, seem like something that happened to some one else, or like a page that you once read in a book. I found, in the course of a long and interesting afternoon, only one old man who remembered his past life in any detail: he wore the Mutiny ribbon on the breast of his dark blue pea-jacket.

‘Yes, sir, it was April,’ he said. ‘X’s division was on our left. I was in the Somersets. Oh, yes, I’m Somerset, from Bath, but it was a bit too sleepy for me when I was a young fellow. I got out quick into the army and I’ve never been back. . . . Well, as I was saying, Y’s Cavalry Brigade had gone on in front of us . . . we went into action! We captured the Rani of Bhang: a tiny woman she was, no higher than that, sir, and when we captured her she was riding in a little gold palanquin. The magistrate said to her: “And now you’ve got to suffer,” he said, “like you’ve made others suffer. Twenty years for you!” he said, and that’s what she got, sir, and serve her right. . . .’

The old man saluted the adjutant and walked off. They all salute; and so slowly and so punctiliously. I think they love to salute their officers: it pulls them back, perhaps, to the bad old days. Slow old hands coming to the peaks of caps, grey old heads trying to swing round sharply, ribbons of forgotten battles on their breasts, and still miraculously erect, still brass-buttoned, still polished. . . .

Wonderful old boys.

The great hall of Chelsea Hospital is, I think, the most magnificent thing of its kind in the world. In this splendid oak room hung with captured flags—how the French eagles lean out, still shining faintly with gilt—hung with relics of old wars and with the portraits of famous generals long departed from the Army List, the warriors of Chelsea, who seem to have slipped out of some earlier world, meet together as contemporaries.

Tobacco is their chief happiness, but they still like more beer and whisky than their pocket-money permits. It is a puzzle to them now and then why they cannot carry as much drink as they used to carry when they were swaggering about the world in the '70th Foot'! When a generous stranger plies them with liquor in return for a sometimes hastily remembered story of a Border war, they feel quite queer. They suppose they must be getting old!

They play cards and billiards, read papers, talk and cough and wheeze in this delicious room; and their marvellous old faces would keep a painter busy for years.

Down one side of the room is a long glass case full of medals. Some of these show the head of George IV. Dozens of them show Queen Victoria as a pretty, slim young girl. These are the medals of old men who die without a 'next of kin'.

The oldest men of all are to be found in the hospital. There are still four Crimean veterans at Chelsea and seven Indian Mutiny men.

'I find', said the wise, humorous-eyed Sister whose white dress shines with war ribbons, 'that seventy is the critical age. An old man of seventy thinks that he has come to the end of things. If

one can get him past that age he may go on living to ninety. After seventy he becomes proud of his age. Each birthday is a triumph. In fact, he often adds on a few years when he reaches eighty. . . .’

I found this so true. An old man, who is going blind, was sitting before the fire, his stick in one hand, his pipe in the other, his white beard lying over the pale blue ribbon of the Crimea on his tunic.

‘I’m ninety-five,’ he said to me in a thin voice. ‘Ninety-five!’

‘And I’m ninety,’ said his ancient friend, who was sitting in the next chair. He touched the old Crimean man with the stem of his pipe: ‘But’s he’s seen more service than I have.’

‘I’ve been feeling awful queer this last week,’ said the older man. His friend touched him again with the pipe stem:

‘He’s wore out!’ he explained to me.

They talked a little of the Rifle Brigade and of certain line regiments under the old name ‘foot’, but how impossible to expect their lingering memories to retain anything of history. The eyes of the heroes only sparkle now when some other hero bags their favourite chair. Sparks of the devil in these old men yet! And the Charge of the Light Brigade seems a silly thing compared with the importance of the match that always goes out as it shakes against the pipe.

§ 3

CHOOSE a windy day, such as April provides in rich profusion, and climb the Monument. If there is sun so much the better. Without wind there is

no view of London, for the smoke of a million chimneys lies like a black sheet over the city, hiding it and obliterating the green hills Tilbury way, the green hills Harrow way, and the emerald heath at Hampstead.

In a box at the base of the Monument sits a grey-haired man who takes your threepence and tells you that there are three hundred and eleven steps in the spiral staircase ; and, yes, the fish at Billingsgate is pretty strong this morning ; and, no, very few people ever come to climb the Monument at this time of year ! (He agrees that this is the right time to climb it !) But in the season you couldn't count the Americans and Japanese and French people and others of less obvious nationality who like to walk about on the roof of London and gaze out on the greenness of Kent, and trace the Thames twisting like a silver eel through the darkness and the smoke towards hills and the sea.

'And they all blame the steps !' says the guardian of the Monument. 'Some think we ought to put in a lift. But what I say is : If you can go up and not feel a twinge of anything, then there's no need for you to go wasting your money on doctors. . . .'

That man is right. The Monument staircase is a cheap gymnasium. Once up and down every day would reduce the superfluous fat of the City of London, would send the blood tingling through the body, and, if it did not kill within the week, would be equivalent to many rounds of golf.

When you look up from Step 1 you feel like a microbe at the extremity of a long and curly corkscrew. The staircase loops round and round, ending in a far circle that seems no larger than a finger-ring. At intervals all the way up thoughtful

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Sir Christopher Wren provided little embrasures, where you can sit and puff.

At Step 204 you realize that you really must stop cigarette smoking, at Step 250 you think rather sadly of the return journey, at Step 300 daylight begins to dawn from above, and, after a last and rather gallant effort, you walk out on the stone balcony, and—below lies London !

What a medieval mass of smoke ! Even on clear, windy days, with the far spire of Harrow Church like a black pin on a green pincushion, there is smoke over London. As you look at those busy chimneys you wonder what Americans, who grow romantic every time they see a ' coal fire ', would say to the sight of millions of chimneys, each one pouring out a dark blue wisp that forms a poisonous cloud drifting through the streets.

Londoners do not notice this on the ground level, or perhaps they are inoculated, but, from the height of the Monument, London is a city bathed in smoke. The streets of the City end in blue mists. The spires of the Wren churches push their grey heads above it, and any object more than half a mile away is obliterated by smoke till a wind springs up. The roar of traffic comes up to you. When you hold tight to the iron balustrading you can feel the vibration.

Tiny omnibuses run below, tiny men cross the road ; in offices like sections of honeycomb, thousands of typists are tapping their machines in one big building. You explore the activities of thirty firms as your eye sweeps the frontage. Managers at lonely desks, secretaries coming in with papers, typists smoothing their hair and typing. In one room two office boys are having a fight. What a hive !

On the roof of another building a man is putting a roller over a golf course! Behind runs the Thames, grey and misty: barges, tugs, cranes, and here and there an anchored ship. A Lilliputian train puffs out from the huge, jet-black ugliness of Cannon Street Station. On the other side Tower Bridge is faintly visible. Immediately below, midgets carry fish in baskets, and a long line of carts twists down to Billingsgate.

The Monument, which marks the spot where the Great Fire of London began, was once popular with suicides, and that is the reason the City fathers put the hideous cage over the platform. William Green, a weaver, was the first to jump off in 1750. On June 25th this man, wearing a green apron, came to the Monument door and asked the man at the bottom to take care of his watch. A few minutes later he was heard to fall. The next man was Thomas Craddock, a baker. He fell off accidentally when leaning over to look at an eagle which was hung in a cage from the bars of the parapet. Lyon Levi, a financially troubled diamond merchant, jumped over the platform in 1810; and in 1839 a young woman named Margaret Meyer, the daughter of a baker, flung herself into the street below. In the same year a young boy committed suicide there. The last tragedy was in 1842, when a Hoxton servant girl, Jane Cooper, tucked her clothes tightly between her knees, climbed over the iron railing, and dived head foremost into space.

At this point the City of London thought the Monument was becoming too popular, so a suicide-proof cage was erected.

You may, or you may not, think of all this as you

stand alone on the roof of London. How lonely it is up there ! It occurs to you that this is perhaps the only public spot in the centre of London in which you can be alone. You wonder how many lovers in London's history have found this the only spot for an unobserved kiss ; and then some one coughs and you turn to see an official sitting in a secluded box.

'I'm here to prevent people throwing bottles,' he says. 'There's no limit to the silly things people do. Some want to throw pennies. Imagine what a penny would feel like all the way from here !'

You walk down ; and the man at the other end seems quite pleased when you tell him that it is well worth threepence.

§ 4

TAILORS in Savile Row know him well. He is ageing almost imperceptibly, not so straight as once he was, and his experienced eyes lie in dark bags full of wrinkles. Newspaper boys still call him, quite inaccurately, 'Colonel'. He possesses about £600 a year from stock and his wealthy friends are worth £2,000 a year in bed and board, in return for which he is amusingly cynical at dinner.

He may be fifty or sixty. It is inconceivable that he should ever have married ; that his hard sense of humour should have permitted him to reproduce himself. Life to him is a tragi-comedy, and he sits, rather bored, in a free stall. Sometimes you meet him in Lady X's villa on Montecatini ; he pops up in somebody's yacht at Palermo ; he exudes a certain richness at house-parties. It is always to him that a host turns when a new wine demands

appreciation, when a new dish deserves an accolade. Bankrupt Petronius . . . but rich in talk, a millionaire in experience of the world and of men ; an old man who has always managed to live well on nothing, not a parasite on society so much as an inevitable attachment ; not a borrower, even of epigram ; a cynical poor old Brummell.

You will always meet him at your tailor's in April, for this is the time of year when he orders his annual suit of clothes. You and I dash in, choose cloth, bully the tailor into making the suit with only one fitting, and dash out again. Not so Petronius. How he lingers, fussing worse than any woman, considering sleeve buttons, pondering the fall of a lapel as a business man ponders a deal that may not turn out too well.

Very good, sir, if *you* say so.

The tailor, the man whom you have seen autocratic with peers' trousers, kowtows to old Petronius, abases himself before him, moves round him in a condition of mental genuflexion. Why ? He knows perfectly well that the old man is broke, that the suit will be sent to some small two-room garret somewhere near Park Lane, that it will be the only suit he will make for him until next May—but . . . there is a something about him that money cannot buy, something that persists against reason, as though—well, as though generations of Brummells are speaking to generations of tailors.

The old man's money may not speak ; but his blood does !

And quite soon now you will see him—neat waisted and white gloved, walking slowly along Bond Street in the morning as if he hadn't a care on earth. Of all the people who make Bond Street

a human drama he, to me, is the most interesting ; the born guest, the preordained shadow of the rich, a type older than Rome. He bears some relation to the medieval jester, owes something to the freedmen of, say, the time of Claudius, has some qualities of the soldier of fortune, and the heart of a wandering philosopher, all of this filtered through Oxford, burdened by a tradition and watered down by racial anæmia.

‘Charming!’ say women.

‘Knows his way about!’ say men.

‘Poor sponge,’ says the Comic Muse, ‘who would rather hitch his canoe to a friend’s yacht than take off his coat and paddle it himself.’

In spite of his knowledge it is really remarkable how he manages, on his £600, to find his way into the right places, to drift through the London season in just the right set. If only he had any commercial energy what a school for climbers he could run !

As he walks down Bond Street, observe how his new suit acts like wine on him ; how obviously amusing he is as he stops to talk with a woman—a useful woman with a place in Scotland ! If ever his conscience says, ‘You old fraud, you old hanger-on, you should be ashamed of yourself!’ I am certain his better self immediately replies, ‘Rot ! I give them dashed good value for money. . . .’

Sometimes in the Autumn, when all his friends have left London, you will see old Petronius sitting on a green seat in Hyde Park with the yellow leaves sailing down above him. It hurts to feel that he has been left out of a house party, brings out the truth that he is growing old, and, worse, dull. So he just sits there, with the little gold, burnt-out

glories of Summer falling as softly as a sigh, thinking—who knows what? The light is drawn out of the sky and dusk falls; the traffic spins glowing on the far side of the rails; lovers pass through the dark tunnel of trees; from Knightsbridge come smooth grey limousines with girls in silver cloaks, pale as moths against the dove-grey cushions, and this old man sits with the only company in which his wit and courage fail—with himself.

Loneliness is like a ghost at the end of life, loneliness and no one to care, no one to love, and life over. You cannot mock life and escape the bill.

So, maybe, as a chill wind pulls the dead leaves into a dance, the old man, who has never before lacked an audience, rises, shivering a little, and goes to his empty rooms wishing . . . wishing that he could afford a pint of dry champagne.

M A Y

§ 1

‘**A**WFULLY . . . er . . . frightfully jolly.
You know what I mean !’

When the Royal Academy opens its inexpensive doors to the public on the first Monday in May there are two things worth noting : the artist who lingers near his picture listening-in and the poor ordinary dragged-to-Burlington-House young man who gropes for words to express his insincerity.

Women are essentially cruel. They know more about art chat than the average man, and at any of these big art shows you can see them dragging the captive behind them—a husband or generally a sweetheart—making it necessary for him to prove that he is not a Philistine, a most difficult and wearing process to all honest sportsmen.

There is no more harrowing sight in the year than that of good plain fellows brought up on golf, tennis and cricket, fumbling for a Chelsea point of view in order that a pair of blue eyes may not scorn them. The most popular expression is that of damp sickliness, but with a little careful eavesdropping it should not be difficult for any Philistine to learn how to approach a picture, crouch, creep away from it, close one eye, put up a hand as if warding it off, and say vaguely :

‘Something wrong . . . somewhere . . . middle distance . . . but not bad !’

That, anyhow, is better than the naïve ‘Awfully jolly’ which brings a girl’s eyes round on the observer like a couple of searchlights !

How inevitable is the first public crush at the

Royal Academy. It is as happy-go-lucky as the private view is sadly smart. The same herds of slim, sandy-legged maidens, the same rusty old ladies, the same intelligent young men, the same dull but honest husbands, the same old men whose eyes seem dim with fifty years of Royal Academy gazing, and the same visitor wearing an obstinate-looking top-hat like a cat that has been stroked the wrong way. Occasionally you meet a Forsyte left over from the private view.

And the same pictures! Girls without clothes in arm-chairs or standing beside streams, lobsters and cabbages lying on the usual plate, the sea coming in or going out, moonlight on Venice, and crowds of drawing-room women radiating a uniform sweetness—chocolate-box queens.

In the crowd, among the clustered schoolgirls and the solemn, large-hatted schoolboys, moves many an artist. This is the day the unhung come to see how much better their work is than that which found favour in the eyes of the Hanging Committee. From picture to picture they drift; and then, perhaps, they go home and take out their master-pieces and feel superior.

‘By Jove, that’s good, Mary!’ says a man. ‘That’s what I call a picture! Look at that egg-cup! Look at that bit of cake! They stand out; they’re real! Don’t you feel you could take a spoon and hit that egg? I’m hungry!’

A few women gaze mournfully at the speaker and move away, for you are not supposed to feel hearty at the Royal Academy. In front of a field full of buttercups and sheep you discover its author.

‘It’s sold,’ he says triumphantly.

A L O N D O N Y E A R

‘ I always heard that murderers were unable to keep away from the scene of the crime ! ’

‘ As a matter of fact ’, he whispers, ‘ I came to hear what the public think about it. Although I oughtn’t to say so, it’s a pretty good thing . . . not that it matters what they say, but, well, you know . . . ’,

‘ And have you heard anything worth repeating ? ’

‘ Nothing intelligent ! One old lady melted and said she felt like lying down and rolling in the grass, and a very pretty girl—blonde—said that she felt she could actually pluck the buttercups, and how cuddlesome the sheep were. This is the reward one receives for months of struggle.’

At this moment a man and woman come up, tilt their heads, walk to a side, and the woman says in a penetrating voice :

‘ Who ever saw blue grass ? ’

‘ Rotten ! ’ says the man.

The father of blue grass seems about to defend his child, so you leave him. . . .

Brass turnstiles are still clicking, admitting the day-long crowd, leading them to oceans of small talk ; and outwards goes the crowd.

‘ Nothing great ! Nothing you’d like to . . . *live with.*’

Poor artists.

§ 2

MAYTIME in the Row.

The sun shines from a dappled sky. In the golden light the young leaves, crisply uncurling, resemble swarms of tiny green butterflies clustered to the trees, and the shadows of the tall elms lie

over the straight stretch of chocolate tan like thin pencils. Such sharpness of grass, such a sweet scene of cut lawns mingled with the warmth of new-turned soil. Companies of yellow tulips stand up like the armies of fairyland stiff on parade. Here an early rhododendron holds its wine-dark flowers in the sun ; there neat beds of small, simple flowers hide the soil. Hyde Park, the pulse of elegant London, now beats to the old tune. The green chairs are out in their thousands, the tiny ping of the ticket man's punch sounds above the chatter as a newcomer takes a seat ; and down that gentle, undulating avenue beside the Row strolls a crowd—mostly visitors looking at London.

It is eleven o'clock. The hoof-marks of the business man's horse, printed in the tan before breakfast, have been obliterated by the horses of those who go later to offices in Whitehall. Now the cavalcade grows every minute, as those come trit-trotting through the Park gates to whom a ride in the Row, a bath, and luncheon are the chief events of the morning.

To the left is the patchy, weathered whiteness of the lodge gates ; to the right, a tunnel of sun-speckled trees ; through the Park rails ahead comes the drone and surge of traffic ; houses and shops, small and bright, are like the background to a Lovat Fraser sketch.

Three abreast they come, cantering, kicking the tan behind ; two fat ponies and a groom, two delicious pink and white maids, their thin legs in Jodhpur breeches, their long hair in plaits, their little arms hardly strong enough to rein in their good-natured mounts. Back and forward go the riders, walking, trotting, cantering. Now a matron,

with a felt hat on a bun of hair, comes galloping along like a major at the head of a charging squadron, firm as a rock on her side saddle. A girl riding astride, not too happy on her patient hack ; young men, old men, good horses, and horses—chiefly horses. Now and then the crowds stop and watch a rider.

‘ Lord Blańk ! ’

The provincial visitors follow the rider with their eyes ; the horsey ones admire his mount. Blood ! The best horse in the Row !

‘ The Row’s bucking up a lot,’ says a man. ‘ I hear that quite a lot of people intend to bring horses up from the country this season.’

‘ Ah,’ says his friend, ‘ do you remember the Row fifty years ago, my boy ? You couldn’t turn out in your old clothes then. . . . ’

‘ Ah ! ’ they say, and sigh and shake their heads and go off to the club !

I walk on towards Knightsbridge, loving everything about Hyde Park, loving the detached men in odd corners who feed mahogany-headed cock sparrows, the trim nursemaids with their shining charges, the Mayfair mother and daughters who stop to chat with a rider, the idle holiday crowds.

I smile to remember that when King Charles was executed Hyde Park was sold for £17,068 2s. 8d. ! I wonder what each blade of grass is worth to-day ! I remember how Henry VIII hunted and hawked here, how the English kings have always paraded here on their horses : and I try to recollect the names of those men who came here in the first chill glimmer of dawn, to fling their coats on the grass, salute, and then . . . a glitter and click of rapiers, a stamping of red-heeled shoes, a shifting

of ground, and eventually an insult wiped out, an indiscretion avenged, a woman defended.

Suddenly, as if a cloak had been flung over the sun, semi-darkness falls and rain comes down. There is a rush for the trees. From the Row comes the sweet rasp of boots on stirrup leathers, the pretty jingle of bits, the muffled thud of hoofs. The rain ceases. The sun reappears. My eye catches a blaze of scarlet from Constitution Hill : the King's Guard trotting back from Whitehall, cloaked ! How the sun fires their brass helmets, runs the length of their drawn swords ! They rein in to walk as they come towards the Park gates ; red cloaks, black horses, and gold helmets.

‘Gorgeous !’ says a girl.

Reins slip through brown gloved fingers and riders turn to look.

In a side-walk an old man, still as a stone, watches a sparrow perched on his hand as though it were the most beautiful thing on earth.

§ 3

I WILL give you a little taste of London few have savoured, because the public is excluded till it has been enjoyed. This is the first appearance of the King and Queen at the outset of the season ; and it is always a private visit.

Ten-thirty in the morning. As I walk up the avenue, with the Chelsea Hospital on my right, I see the tents of the Flower Show peeping between green leaves ; lovely May-time sight, lovely send-off to the season ! The King and Queen are inside and no sightseer will be admitted till they leave—otherwise there would not be room to move ! A

smart crowd waits, therefore, in the warm sunshine at the closed gates, sitting on the pediment of the rails watching the ancient warriors in the gardens behind : old scarlet-coated men who smoke their pipes as they recall battles long ago or—wonder about the winner of the three-thirty ! A gardener walks behind an enthusiastic motor lawn-mower ; each revolution of the scythes sends up a warm scent-cloud of cut grass.

I produce a yellow judge's ticket, the crowd behind the gates looks on enviously ; and I go in under a cool avenue of fresh leaves.

Royalty has the same effect on an exhibition that the divisional general had on a battalion during the War. People feverishly polish objects with an eye on the corner ; men come up and whisper mysteriously ; the air is thrilling with expectancy.

I walk on between lines of tents through whose triangular flaps are seen the most lovely flowers in the world. I pause to watch a man dust the nose of a stone Cupid. I walk round a gorgeous little Italian *paradiso*, marvelling at the beauty an expert gardener can pull out of crazy pavement, tiny rock-plants and half a bathful of water. As I bend down to admire the Lilliputian world which grows between the cracks and in the crevices, a deep voice says, ' May, I want you to look at this ! '

The King ! He is standing at my elbow ! I raise my hat and retire in good order. The King raises his shining silk hat. I notice that he is wearing striped morning trousers creased down the sides, as King Edward often wore them. There is a large white flower in his coat and he carries an umbrella hooked over his arm. He points out a flower to the Queen, his hand in a light tan glove.

Women always walk round flower shows more slowly than men. Men take in masses of colour, women adore to examine detail. The Queen is some way behind the King, bending over a tiny plant. She smiles and comes up to him and together they go on. This is the one day in the crowded procession of the London season when you may meet the King and the Queen separated from the pageantry of a palace. They have come to enjoy flowers like two ordinary spectators and, without dogging their footsteps, it is possible to feel how good it must seem to them to escape from the publicity of the Crown and to hear no Anthem when they break cover.

Privacy is never quite possible, even at the Flower Show. A rather delightful crowd drifts after them. Some crowds must be hateful to crowned heads: the jostling, would-be fraternal crowds who would extend democratic freedom into the region of ill-breeding. This crowd has, in the main, a rustic air. It is composed of men and women who have come from many parts of the country with their greenhouse marvels. The women drop curtsies whenever the Queen comes in sight, the men hold their hats. If the royal visitors remain stationary they edge up a step nervously, as a herd of deer will advance towards a man. The King raises his hat, the Queen smiles; and so they go on. Such letters must go home to Somerset and Devon: 'And I heard the King call the Queen "May"!'

To a person of any sensibility the private view of this show induces a keen desire to avoid the King and Queen in order that you may not intrude upon what is so obviously a private occasion. The more conscientiously you bend over bushes and

peer at blossoms the more difficult it becomes, for sooner or later you hear the King's voice again and the Queen answering, you see a man who has created a new gardenia being presented to the Queen, and taking her hand as if it were red-hot metal.

So you meet their Majesties again and again in dim marquees which are stuffy with a million sweet scents. They walk over the pungent, bruised grass admiring luscious banks of flaming yellow and red, foaming seas of white and flame : azaleas, carnations, roses.

The shy crowd follows, enjoying this informal glimpse of royalty. I am reminded of earlier times ; say the age of Pepys, when any Londoner in the Mall might come face to face with the King, walking.

Eventually the time arrives when the royal car purrs out over the drive by a back way and the front gates are flung open.

The men and women who have been waiting for an hour and a half flock in to look at flowers and to enjoy that glorious festival of scent and colour that once a year gladdens the heart of grey old London.

§ 4

You will in May walk down Bond Street and allow the flavour of a London morning to roll over the palate like a vintage wine.

Bond Street is one of the world's ways ; it is international. Every great city has its Bond Street. New York has Fifth Avenue, Paris has the Rue de la Paix, Berlin Unter den Linden, and Rome the Via Condotti ; all streets in which the wealth of

great cities has created a demand for those things which distinguish civilization from barbarism—elegance, culture, beauty. In these streets quality has crystallized and, of course, you have to pay for quality, which is, I often think, the only thing worth paying for. When you have made your money—especially if you are a Socialist—it is to the Bond Streets of the earth that you gravitate naturally, no matter how you scorned them in poverty or how you sneered at them from soap-boxes. That is human nature.

When you review all the elegant streets of the world, it boils down to the fact that there is only one Bond Street—ours. Others are more magnificent as streets, but Bond Street has a *cachet* which has nothing to do with mere wealth: it is unself-conscious, it is a Georgian gallant of a street, unhurried and well-bred, a lovable spot—Mayfair's 'main street'.

As you turn in from Piccadilly you slow up, for the crowd on the narrow pavement is as dense as the solid jam of omnibuses and limousines in the road.

A musical comedy actress, who is almost as beautiful as her photographs, steps from her car with a brown richness of sable fur round her, and goes up in a photographer's lift to create a toothsome smile which you will soon see on a soap advertisement. Girls notable for well-modelled legs admire gowns in shop windows, young men gaze at boxes of fat, gold-tipped cigarettes. A smart American *débutante*, who knows every twist of smart New York, walks down Bond Street feeling that this narrow, smoke-painted street is different from anything she has experienced—there is tradition in it.

See that white old man—General Sir X. X., who rode to the relief of Carter in '82. That other man to whom he is talking is a millionaire who began life as a bricklayer's mate.

As you go on you realize that Bond Street on a May morning is a club full of members and visitors. The members walk slowly along, meeting other members ; the visitors are less leisurely, and seem in search of something.

You pass art galleries and shops in which women can indulge every vanity, curio shops full of lovely things, and book shops. Outside a picture shop you meet Soames Forsyte with his head on one side, wondering if such-and-such a painter's work will go up or down in value during the next ten years. Two girls turn to look at a young man, a famous *matinée* god, who knows his attraction. In New Bond Street you pass an auction-room which draws collectors round its green tables from every city in the world. You admire giant cheeses and trussed, powdered quail in a provision shop ; such a homely touch in Bond Street ! It is amusing to know that people still buy groceries in Bond Street, as Nelson did when he lodged there, as Lady Hamilton did, as Dean Swift did, as Boswell did.

Such unselfconsciousness ! A lesser street would have cleared out its Gorgonzola long ago !

Ah, what's this ? A crowd pretending not to be a crowd, feigning interest in a window, yet with one eye on a long, chocolate-coloured limousine, with a tiny crown stamped on the enamelled door and a footman in a long fawn overcoat standing to attention with a rug over his arm.

The omnibuses thread their way cleverly round the

big car, the crowd-in-spite-of-itself grows. Women whisper. Suddenly the shop doors open. There is much discreet curtsying and a woman takes two paces and enters the car. 'The Queen!'

The crowd now smiles, forgetting its bad manners in its delight, and the Queen smiles back. Men raise their hats; women wonder whether they should curtsy or just look pleased. In the background is a flushed woman who happened to be buying a pair of gloves when the Queen came in. Half Kensington will know of this before the day is done! The limousine purrs off and is lost in a maze of wheels.

Down Bond Street you go again, slowly, elegantly, enjoying the faces and the clothes and the windows, and something that is nothing of these—just Bond Street on a May morning.

§ 5

REGENT STREET. . . .

Women in motor-cars, movement, variously inhabited silk stockings, hundreds of eyes above grey fur and brown, smart commissionaires at the kerb, constant surges of traffic left and right from the two circuses, the crowds less hectic than in Oxford Street, less fashionable but quicker than in Bond Street; a delicious, diehard curve into Piccadilly, once so gracious in Nash's brown stucco (departed and now suddenly mourned!); and a fine feeling of space and clean newness.

Regent Street holds a place apart in London streets: Bond Street inspires affection, Piccadilly admiration, Leicester Square curiosity, the Strand sentiment; but Regent Street—once, it is generally

agreed, so lovely and now so modern—commands respect. It is a princely street.

It was built by a prince to lead to a castle in Spain! The Prince Regent, afterwards George IV, built it by Act of Parliament in 1813—only twenty-eight years after the death of General Oglethorpe, who used to boast that he shot woodcock there in the reign of Queen Anne—in order that His Royal Highness might have direct access from Carlton House to the palace which he never built in Regent's Park.

So Regent Street begins at something which is no longer there and ends on the way to something which never existed! Could a street have a vaguer history?

Regent Street, with its cousin Kingsway, is one of the most solid streets in London. The Old Regent Street died hard, block by block, and the new Regent Street, which is the Acropolis in a tail coat and horn rims, has 'arrived', evidently with the intention of seeing this generation right into eternity. It is very solid.

It is a street in which the masculine and the feminine are nicely balanced. Men can shop-gaze here as women shop-gaze in Knightsbridge. Here is gold, here are jewels, here are overcoats and evening gowns. Corsets and dinner jackets exist window by window. A shameless wax woman—sister, I think, of that famous one who years ago stood poised on one foot in a pink nightdress—horrifies rural aunts, but in the next window are irreproachable pianolas. . . .

Regent Street's one revolt is a shop which seems to have withdrawn itself from current architecture with an old-world gesture of disdain. In New York

they would call it a 'shoppe'. It stands back in a state of splendid Tudor complication, as if looking for a herb garden. I admire its reactionary detachment. It looks like Sir Walter Raleigh discovered in broad daylight in the Strand after a Covent Garden masque ; its very clock plays prettily with time, like the clock in the north transept of Wells Cathedral.

I went in here among silks and ivories—a real stately galleon come to anchor—but I was disappointed to find that the crew do not dress to match the ship. Malvolio should be a shop-walker there. Some one should be taught to play on the *viol de gamboys*.

Lower down in Regent Street I bought a pair of gloves in a strange shop. It is a man's shop designed on feminine lines.

Men are furtive shoppers. All our favourite shops are small. We slink into dens in Savile Row whose windows are shrouded against the vulgar gaze by dark screens, and nothing but a pair of trousers in course of composition flung carelessly over the screen conveys to the outside world that this is a tailor's. We hunt our ties and our socks in queer, out-of-the-way places which specialize in ties and socks, and charge us for it. When two of us come together on these little vanities the last-comer lurks in the background, rather embarrassed to have caught a fellow-man ministering to his feet or to his face. We are shy creatures.

This new shop is anti-furtive : it is a blaze of Brummellism. Its many floors reek of masculine vanity. (I found it full of women buying things for their men !) A polite acolyte asked if I would care to be shown over the shop, and I said I would.

A L O N D O N Y E A R

We went up in a lift to magnificent regions, floor on floor blazoning the secrets of a man's wardrobe as shamelessly as the women's stores expose things which are no longer secrets.

In the shirt salon I watched two young men standing in meditative reverence before a glass case in which pale gold light fell cunningly on something new in stripes. Down below there were barbers and a cigarette kiosk and bathrooms.

A marvellous shop, typical of changed Regent Street. . . .

This street, stately by day, becomes at night magic when its windows light up and the jewels sparkle and the gold seems richer.

Men and women go from window to window in this most companionable street, so companionable and fair-minded because if a woman forces you to look too long at silver shoes the next window will give you swift revenge with razors.

The only thing that Regent Street has lost is the Regent. No longer is it possible to stand at Piccadilly Circus—or is it Piccadilly Square?—and imagine the Regency beaux riding past the elegant brown buildings, so designed to show off men, women, horses and carriages. Regent Street has outgrown all that, but it has not lost its title: it is still princely—much more princely, I am sure, than Brummell's 'fat friend' of Carlton House.

§ 6

OXFORD STREET is, to a man, an astonishing sight. It is a long, slow mass of women. It is worth going to look at. There are slim women and plump women; lovely women and not so lovely; fair

women and dark women ; young women and not so young ; women who powder and women who are unconscious of their noses ; women with beautiful legs and not so beautiful ; women for whom any man would lay down his life ; women for whom, presumably, men have done so.

At no time in the year is such a wide selection of women to be observed in London. Novelists in search of heroines should go to Oxford Street because every type can be discovered there, moving, talking, laughing, treading on one another's toes, packed together like a herd. The mass effect of so much woman-power—each unit in the mass the centre, or designed to be the centre, of some man's life—is astonishing. They pack the pavements. They form a living fringe to the shop windows. Where the windows end round street corners the crowd of women ends. They stretch in an unbroken line from the Marble Arch to the Tottenham Court Road—the massed bands of the household brigade ; the wives, sisters, sweethearts, mothers and grand-mothers of the County of London. . . .

Oxford Street, as becomes the street of women, is a queer, moody street. Its south side is in a different mood from its north. The south of Oxford Street appears to be related to the old Strand. On this side there are men. People move more quickly. They are obviously going somewhere. The north side—this devastating herd of women !

The morning mood of Oxford Street is different from the afternoon mood. In the morning, Regent Street is on bowing terms with Oxford Street. Women in fur coats drive up in motor-cars. In the afternoon Regent Street keeps itself to itself and allows Oxford Street to 'surge'.

I believe it to be true that many of the thousands of women who descend on Oxford Street from the suburbs know London only by Oxford Street. In Regent Street they would be at sea. In Bond Street they would be lost. Their invasions are known as 'Going up West'.

§ 7

If you have a dog-fancier in the family you will have watched with something between alarm and admiration how he gradually tends to resemble his dog. In time it becomes difficult to tell which of them won prizes at shows.

Women, I am glad to say, can fancy dogs and still look like women. As soon as you enter the Ladies' Kennel Association's show at Olympia you know that it is going to be interesting, because the country girl has come up to town in a real country-cut tweed costume. Is there anything more beautiful in all the green shires of England than the girl who drives the dog-cart or walks through the village with five fat Cairn puppies lumbering along at the hem of her skirt?

Here and there, you must admit, a stray whippet has reproduced its sharpness on the face of a mistress addicted to a high masculine collar; but, generally speaking, the members of the Ladies' Kennel Association prove that England is still sound at heart, that there is not a great sale for rouge at Little Bumbleton, and that the hardness of a dog's life has been greatly exaggerated.

The tragedy of writing is that you always feel that you could do so much better in paint. As you wander round this show you will wish that

you could paint a picture of the girl round whose legs a startled Borzoi has thrice wrapped his leash ; very pretty in a Lewis Baumerish style. So is the corn-coloured girl who sits smoking a cigarette, in the same pen with a retriever, her arm among the black silkiness, a green jade bracelet giving just the touch of colour necessary, and the dog's eyes, with a million unwritten sonnets in them, gazing at her as only a dog can gaze. . . .

There is a large, masterful woman combing a handful of dog that resembles a pincushion ; there is a slim slip of a girl assembling the limb bulk of a Great Dane that could eat her in two gulps.

Dogs are generous creatures. The way they humour our human incomprehensibility is a lesson in tolerance. If you have ever gone to a doctor, been undressed, prodded, suffered the humiliation of having your stomach pressed, patted, and slapped, you can enter into the feelings of certain finely-bred dogs at a championship show.

You watch with deep sympathy a parade of Borzois round a judging ring, beautiful, swift, elongated creatures, thin as though they had just been pressed through a mangle. In the face of their utter embarrassment, their almost blushing shame, you wonder how any man has the nerve to explore their forelegs, lift them from the floor and examine the privacy of their mouths !

I doubt if we would understand anything more about dogs if they could talk to us with words instead of eyes. You will walk past hundreds of pens and enjoy the personality of dogs ; St. Bernards, vast of jowl and dignified, poodles (the Little Lord Fauntleroy of the kennel in their absurd frills and fripperies), bulldogs like big frogs, manly disdainful

Danes, and the most melancholy dog on earth, the wolfhound, brooding on the ineffable pathos of life.

A show is to some dogs a ghastly affair. They regard it as a permanent condition and become wild about it. Others, notably terriers, consider it an amusing occasion, demanding continual comment.

In a corner pen you discover the philosopher. He is a black Skye terrier with hair like a shaving brush. He is curled up in a ball so that you see the little soft black pads of his feet, and his whiskery nose is buried in his chest. His body heaves with happy slumber. Now and then a leg twitches, and I suppose he is far away from shows following his mistress over the hills. In the next pen a white-whiskered face peeps round at the sleeper with an expression of blank surprise: 'How on earth can you sleep while these vulgar fox-terriers are inviting us to battle?'

At luncheon-time the girls in tweed perch themselves on the edge of pens and bring out cold salmon and cold chicken and sandwiches of many kinds. Now and then a pink tongue flickers at their ears and a pair of eyes say 'How long does this purgatory continue? You know I'd do anything on earth for you, but, really, this is a bit thick! Look at that conceited Schipperke over the way! I've been nicely brought up till now, and here you go and bring out all my repressions. . . .'

Anyhow, I hope that when life is over and the Spirit of Man comes for judgement, some one in authority will up and say in defence, 'Dogs adored him.'

EVERY London morning, two buildings—one in Pall Mall, the other in the Haymarket—exert a magnetic influence over our American visitors.

Beautiful girls, who compliment hotel suites by living in them, slip from their salmon-pink *négligées* into coats and skirts. Or perhaps they slip into fashionable little Paris gowns. They sometimes wear silk stockings with low-heeled shoes of infinite variety, shoes which look as though a temperamental cobbler had changed his mind at the last moment and decided not to make them suède all over. Some have suède toes and patent leather sides, others have patent leather toes and suède flanks. There is no rule.

The men who belong so definitely to these women put on tweed suits, the coats tightly belted so that a fat man of fifty-five looks twenty years from behind and twenty stone from the front. They light cigars, take up straw hats and, introducing pink, smooth faces still shining with the best advertised shaving cream into the adjacent boudoir, remark :

‘ Say, now, when’ll you girls show some speed ? ’

‘ Oh, fade away, dad ; we’re not ready yet ! ’ says something very lovely and worth while.

‘ Well, lookit here,’ pleads dad. ‘ I wanta see my mail. . . . I’m just crazy to see my mail.’

There is a fussing with coats like draughts boards gone gay, and eventually they are on the way to one of those two magnetic buildings—one in Pall Mall, one in the Haymarket—those links with the United States, those hands across the sea, those homes from home, those G.H.Q.s of the almighty letter of credit.

A L O N D O N Y E A R

Here you meet them all : Mamie from Oshkosh (Wis.), and Grace from Washington (D.C.), and Maud from Louisville (Ky.). They lean against counters gazing earnestly at clerks, or they stand in little knots in the centre of the wide floor, saying, 'Why, fancy meeting you ! We thought you were in Rome !'

America has won the expensive freedom of the world. There has never been any country since the world began from which its citizens escape so frequently and with such apparent joy. Some of them seem delighted that there is no place like home.

Among the bright exiles comes now and then some tall potential contessa, a dollar princess, who casts not a glance at the rabble as she goes with cool elegance to the banking department with a powerful letter of credit :

'I want eight hundred dollars, please.'

They give it to her in crisp fivers.

'I can't carry that junk around !' she says, pushing back a pile of odd pennies with a scented grey glove.

'Darling ! We were only talking about you yesterday.'

'Mary !'

Another dollar princess gushes up. 'Yes, mother and dad are in London ! Yes ; Claridges. I'm going to Court next week. I'm having a dandy time ! You must meet Lord Blink ! Such a charming man ! Let's have a party !'

The other exiles put their heads together and whisper a well-upholstered name as they watch the girls. You feel a new romance in life. To think that pork with tomato sauce can create and support

such beauty ! You regard the dull, useful men, and think that here a law of nature has been marvelously reversed, and you wonder what nature intends to do about it. Woman is the American religion, and she is quite aware of it. She justifies American civilization. The United States cannot point to a long history or to much tradition, but it can say : ‘ I want to have you meet Maudie ! ’ And Maudie, nine times out of ten, makes the Battle of Hastings look cheap. But we are diverting. . . .

Watch Dad !

The girls are chattering together about the deluxe trip to Shakespeare’s country which he has just bought over the counter. Dad stands, a little removed, fumbling over a handful of letters whose stamps bear the head of truthful George. He goes a sickly colour and lets his cigar out, biting the end and glooming, an open letter in his hand.

‘ Why, dad, what . . . ’

‘ Darn it . . . oh, darn that bonehead ! I might have known he wasn’t worth a row of beans ! Darn him ! ’

He goes on glooming with the letter in his hand. His wife surges into the catastrophe to the scent of Chypre.

‘ Is it the Amalgamated Pig Ore ? ’ she asks gently.

‘ Yep,’ he replies bitterly. ‘ Guess I gotta beat it back and straighten things out. Things have gotten into a bad way ! ’

There is a desperate tilt to his hat as he goes out into the Haymarket, his women-folk before him, glum and slightly peevish because they are going to Hamlet’s country without the prince of dollars.

‘Darn it!’ he says helplessly to them—but in his soul he feels warm and comfy because there are typewriters clicking there and tape machines. He is going back where life is real.

§ 9

OLYMPIA enters the London season with the Royal Tournament, and not to go to the Royal Tournament is like giving up asparagus in spring, or, later on, renouncing strawberries : it gives you the flavour of the year.

The Duke of Connaught is in the royal box, and Olympia is packed. Just once a year the Army Council makes our theatrical producers look like infants. I say the Army Council from sheer tact, but I think that the people we must thank are those smart young captains and lieutenants who appear suddenly below the royal box, stand to attention while their unit does its bit, about turn, salute, and disappear to (I hope) congratulate the sergeant-major !

What a slick show it is ! Even the way fatigue-parties move box jumps ‘by numbers’ is a ‘turn’ worth praise. Now and then, if you listen, you can hear a sergeant growling, ‘Come on there—come on !’ Such a cry from a far country !

I have four complete thrills at the Tournament. I am thrilled by the riding and the remounts from Weedon. These boys canter into the arena, take off their stirrup leathers, fling them into the tan, and do all kinds of ‘stunts’ at the canter. Then, still cantering, they undo their girths, pull the saddles from beneath them, throw them away, take fences bareback, and while they jump they unbutton and

take off their tunics. It is a splendid show, and—the horses are to be congratulated !

Then thrill two ! If the Royal Air Force is as good in the air as it is on the parade ground there is nothing to fear next time. These boys, who still look eighteen years old, march and handle their rifles with a precision which is positively beautiful. I will go year after year to see them present arms and to hear that unanimous ring of hands on magazines and see that simultaneous puff of pipe-clay. Marvellous ! We who remember how difficult it once was to order arms without being spotted can only sit and gloat over it and wonder a little sadly how much pain and language has gone to the making of it.

They are so good that you follow them, almost hoping to catch some poor criminal out of step ! But you never do !

Suddenly the gates at one end of the arena are flung open and in ride four gold trumpeters of the Life Guards, led by the fat, piebald drum horse. Listen to the sound of cavalry drums and to the silver fanfare ! Behind jingles the musical ride of the 1st and 2nd Life Guards. Pennants fluttering from lances, their white plumes waving, their breast-plates gleaming, they come in, wheel round into line, part, trot round the arena, meet in half sections, meet in sections of four, visit as in lancers, waltz, while the band plays dance music and the big black chargers that follow the King through the streets of London behave like perfect ladies. The usual prima donna that develops a touch of prancing temperament only makes it all more perfect. Is there a finer sight than a Lifeguardsman sitting a restive charger ? Then in a breathless hush they

line up at opposite ends of the arena, the trumpeters blow the charge, and with a cry they press their knees to the saddle, crouch, and fly together with a whistle of lance pennants—but not quite! At the point of contact they wheel round into line, salute the royal box, and calmly trot out—a troop of knights in silver and scarlet. . . .

Of course the Navy does its bit.

The sailors put more ‘beef’ into their ‘turn’ than it seems possible to compress into half an hour. The Navy delights in hauling heavy guns about the world. It seems to love pulling them to pieces, to enjoy throwing the fragments over parapets, to tear wheels from gun carriages, and suddenly to put this metal jig-saw puzzle together again; and all done so quickly that you cannot think it difficult.

As I leave Olympia the guns of the Royal Horse Artillery are rumbling over the tan in that breathless event known as a musical ride. The gunners wear the splendid uniform of the Peninsular War period, and all the old Chelsea pensioners in the audience, some of whom look quite old enough to have won the Battle of Waterloo, bend their white heads together, and feel that this is getting back somewhere near the good old days.

Criss-cross over the arena thunder the guns, the wheels of the gun carriage missing collision by inches as the teams flash by, the four horses of each team, eager, with outstretched necks, galloping as if on their way to save the Empire. Then the sudden end, a grind of wheels, a cloud of dust, a line of gun carriages, and a salute of white whips. . . .

A great show! Also a wonderful object-lesson in the rebuilding of the British Army.

LEAVE the smell of oranges to the night, attack that truculent type of swing-door that loves to help you in with a swift kick in the back, and discover yourself in the morgue-like foyer of Covent Garden. It is a night of grand opera.

If this is your first visit the gloom of the entrance hall surprises you. Perhaps when you were a small child Covent Garden stood with Cinderella's ball in your imagination as the apex of brilliancy. You were taken to see your mother ready dressed for the opera and you wondered, as the carriage wheels rolled off, what this 'opera' might be to deserve such beauty. Before you fell asleep you imagined that specially adorable mother scintillating under glittering candelabra, walking down long avenues with robed kings to eat gigantic pink ices. Perhaps there was lemonade in gold jugs ! The stories you heard in the morning when you crept into her bed saying, 'Tell me about it,' only helped to elevate Covent Garden in your small mind as the ideal setting for the annual general meeting of the Knights of the Round Table.

By the time you go to Covent Garden you are, however, old enough to know that brilliance is a matter of men and women, not balustrades ; and you realize that the entrance to it is sufficiently dull to be entirely distinguished.

As you escape from the entrance hall, you find the foyer packed with people. Queen Victoria would have come to the conclusion that there had been burglary in Mayfair. King Edward, too, would have done some thinking ; but we, who since those times have sold the old home, the acre, and the cow,

know that the pawnbroker still has great-grandmother's diamond tiara. (Everybody else knows, so what does it matter?)

Now and then among the chattering crowd you observe some tenacious old lady crowned with what seem suspiciously like real diamonds; there are scores of beautiful young girls, scores of pink young men in various stages of intellectual apprehension, and one or two smart American dollar princesses who know the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the Scala in Milan, and now stand thrilled by the historic social echoes of Covent Garden.

Moving through the crowd are also those queer people whom grand opera seems to draw out into the world from some paradise of memory: odd little old ladies in embroidered kimonos, strange little old men, who prepare to abandon themselves to this feast of song as the gourmet abandons himself to the first oysters of the season.

A bell!

From the precipice of a stage-box you look out and realize that the opera house itself is a wonderful sight. The great scarlet and gold amphitheatre sweeps round in a majestic curve, tier piled on tier, and in the topmost tiers are people who love opera and do not care who sees them. This is the scene of the most gorgeous public assemblies in the social history of London. Gradually the scarlet stalls fill, slowly the boxes are occupied . . . the gleam of a woman's shoulders, in the shadow behind the whiteness of a man's shirt front. Every second a green or a white or a blue evening gown obliterates a patch of crimson as a stall is taken, until eventually the great theatre loses its original colour and becomes an interesting moving mass of

many tints. Little pearl-handled opera glasses are employed :

‘Oh, there’s Lady X. How old she’s getting. . . . Who’s that red-headed girl with Colonel Z?’

The orchestra begins to sigh and moan. It sits spread out beneath the crimson curtains, bathed in a ghostly light from strip lamps over music-stands. Dozens of violinists try their bows, dozens of brass and wood wind artists blow discreet preliminary toots, a drummer gives a sudden ‘pong’ to his drum and silences it immediately as you would hush a tinkled glass.

Little stray bits of Wagner break through the orchestral impatience ; small curly prophecies, then—silence ! The conductor enters, the audience applauds him, he bows, taps his stand with a baton, and suddenly the great orchestra wades into ‘God Save the King’, playing it with a slow, Teutonic accent. A curious moment. . . .

The lights go down, the first few rows of stalls are bathed in a red glow from the crimson curtains as if in a light from Valhalla. A roll of drums. A settling down all over the dim bowl, and who knows what delicious anticipation or what grim determination to keep awake.

The heavy curtains part, there is a swelling up of great music, and then—a voice.

§ 11

I HAVE seen the moon rise up over the Nile, starlight in the silence of the desert, the strong sun lying over flat African roofs, and many times from the summit of cold mountains I have watched

dawn come slowly. But Kew Gardens in Bluebell Time. . . .

You may travel the world, spend a fortune hunting beauty, but I do not think the earth will give you a lovelier sight than the Bluebell Walk in the freshness of morning. It is Bluebell Sunday, the papers remind you ; and so, with a Sabbath hush over the streets of London, you take the Underground to Kew and pass in to a paradise of smooth lawns and fresh green trees. What peace ! The air is full of small winged noises, the bushes are alive with sudden rustlings. Through the sunlit morning, like a pattern in gold brocade, runs a constant trickle of bird song from tree to tree, song and reply, thrush to thrush, blackbird to blackbird. . . .

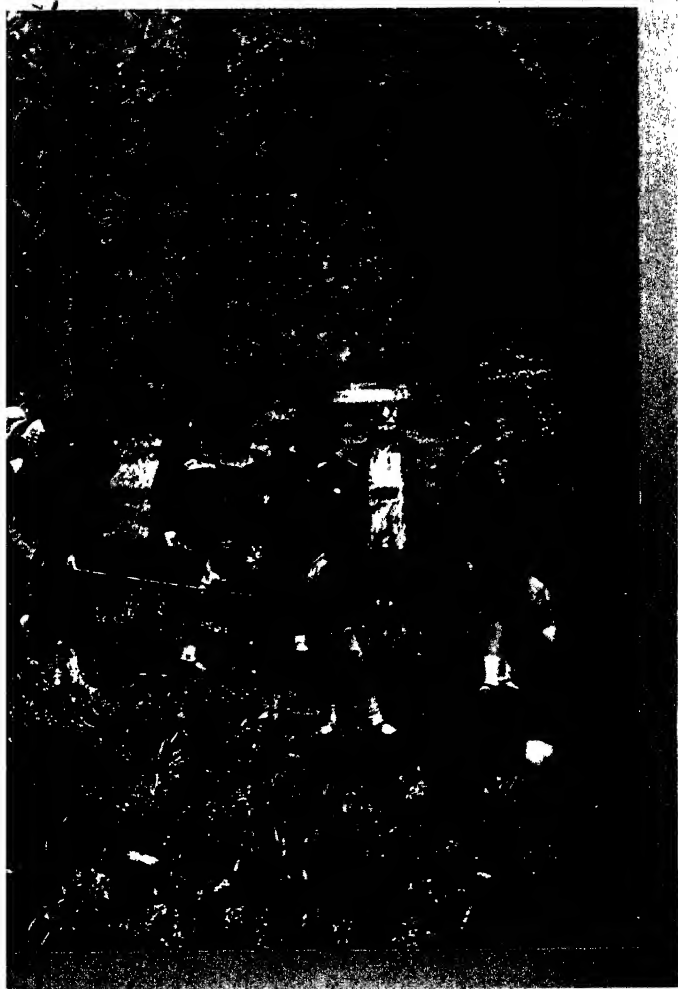
Happiness is in the air ; the warm contentment of natural living things. A thrush, like a little frog, tugs a worm from the grass ; on a still lake a swan moves, a silver line lengthening behind her as she swims ; a small red-billed bird seems to propel itself through the water with much nodding of an ebony head ; two yellow butterflies flicker above a flower.

Perhaps you have noticed that a certain eighteenth-century formality lingers on at Kew ; small temples, little walled nooks where satyrs smile in grey stone, so that, turning a corner, you half expect to see a pair of sophisticated eyes over a flirted fan and a gallant with blood-red heels to his buckled shoes singing an ancient, but never unfashionable, song.

Over long grass, through a dell, up a slight incline starred with daisies. On a seat two people sit holding hands and watching a grey squirrel make sudden scurryings in a tree as it observes them with its boot-button eyes. She has flaming bobbed hair and the



BLUEBELLS IN B



CEW GARDENS



sun sets fire to it, and he is a pale, poetic young man who, I am sure, has no idea of the temper saved up for him in that red glory. How beautiful Titian hair looks among trees ! It must have caused a lot of trouble in Arcady.

Bluebell Walk. . . .

On either side of a railed path is a lake of blue lying under the dappled cool tunnel of tall trees. It is overpowering in its beauty. It is a knee-high mist of blue. In certain lights there is an illusion of a haze above the mist. The millions of tiny bells lie massed together, following the lie of the land, barred with sunlight that falls through the leaves above, in shadow dark, in light startlingly blue, like wistaria.

Unforgettably English. The very soul of an English Spring. In the heart of it all is surely Titania and her small elves Puck and Mustard Seed.

Up and down the railed path walk all kinds of people : girls admiring the scene in polite phrases, young men, some of whom say it is ' pretty ' , many comfortable matrons who look at fairyland, so it seems to me, as they would look into Jevons and Jones's window on a sale day, and one exceedingly prim woman built like a prima donna who wears black gloves and looks neither to right nor to left.

I long for Pelleas and Melisande to come along in their Sunday clothes and kiss for sheer joy ; I ache for the armies of Oberon to advance and storm our dullness.

Outside Bluebell Walk the flowers hold a kind of overflow meeting. They lie in sloping blue carpets under the trees. I watch a small child walk through them up to his chest. A fat child with wide blue eyes. He stoops heavily, picks up

a twig and slowly attempts to throw it at a robin. The robin knows that he is not sufficiently a man to be dangerous and merely flashes off a few feet.

Far off, through cotton-wool as usual, I hear a muffled 'Cuck—oo ! Cuck—oo !'

Families go by with their luncheon in hampers, a competent-looking young girl sets up an easel, takes out paints, runs her hand through her short hair, and begins to paint with an I'll-show-those-bluebells expression. I hope she does !

On the seat beside the squirrel's tree the red-haired girl and her poet are still looking into one another's eyes. The squirrel has lost all fear ; it plays round their feet, sitting up before them, its tiny grey hands against its fluffy stomach. They do not see it. They are looking into one another's eyes as if there only will they find the end of all journeys, the Land of Heart's Desire. . . .

I hope they are right !

§ 12

CYNTHIA goes to Court next Thursday.

The large gilt card in her bedroom, on which the Lord Chamberlain has been commanded to invite her to Buckingham Palace, is now exercising a mesmeric power. Fearsome card ! Only two more days ! Sometimes Cynthia pulls a face at it and turns its gold letters to the wall. Behind it she sees the face of the Lord Chamberlain regarding her with something between contempt and horror, as though she had appeared at Court in a pink nightdress—as last week she dreamt she did.

It seems only yesterday that Cynthia came back from school with hockey clubs and thick ankles.

Now, in the mysterious way these things happen, she is slender and beautiful and—a débutante. Some débutantes prefer a dry Martini to a Manhattan, but Cynthia justifies the legend of girlish innocence which has grown up round the word. On Thursday her small white satin shoes will take their first step into life.

In the Autumn, maybe, we shall see her come out of St. Margaret's with the bells pealing, so little and white and young, with some unworthy fellow leading her out of the shallows into the deeps and perils of life.

If you knew her, her warm sympathy, her touch of wildness balanced by the tradition of 'playing the game' (which conceals so much misery later on), and realized that she will not be able to deal with life for quite a long time, you would watch this process of stepping out with a queer mixture of admiration and fear.

All manner of people have been schooling her to make that essential genuflexion to the King and Queen. Débutantes have been in training for months. The dance schools of Mayfair are packed with them. Blasé buds, some of them. Blushing is not in their line. The old days have gone when a débutante felt that she would be sent to the Tower if one plume was out of place. A Victorian or an Edwardian débutante could blush, but few of the Georgians can. This twittering feeling has been much overdone. Cynthia tells me that two girls she knows are going to a dance on the eve of the Court. Shades of grandmother!

Cynthia has been learning to curtsy since March.

As she progressed, the dancing mistress pinned a tulle veil to her shoulders and Cynthia, very

solemn, walked over the parquet floor towards two empty chairs occupied by the ghosts of royalty. Other débutantes watched, playing the part of the Court. Opposite the first chair Cynthia sank in the way she was told. ('No, don't bend your head!') Two gliding steps to the right and another sinking earthwards. ('Be quite natural, and do remember your right foot. Good! You're perfect!')

So Cynthia agreed till quite recently; but that terrifying gilt card with all it stands for has got on her nerves! Suppose something goes wrong on Thursday. Suppose her shoe buckle catches up in her train and she cannot become perpendicular again; suppose . . . Poor Cynthia!

'Don't be a silly ass,' says John. 'Of course you won't fall down. Look here, I'm the King, and you go over there and come in. . . . Now—down you go. . . .'

She curtsies gravely to her brother who, at the critical moment, holds out a hand and says:

'Well, I'm mighty glad to have you know me. . . .'

From this point the rehearsal departs from Court etiquette!

Such tremblings and flurryings, such a going and coming of dressmakers, such visits to photographers and to Bond Street, where women, who seem a neat compromise between a musical comedy actress and a hospital nurse, conjure up complexion out of pots.

Each one of Cynthia's small nails will be a work of art in itself, pink, shining. The girls who will fuss over her in the last hours will, some of them, assist her towards perfection with the same romantic enthusiasm with which every woman helps to pin-up

every bride. Going to Court ! Something of the fairy-tale princess lingers here. The starting-point of romance.

When the little manicurist has done her work she may think awhile of Cynthia radiant, going on towards the Throne, wonder what it feels like to be Cynthia, to be stepping into grandeur, white and wonderful with spread train.

We know it is more than this . . . much more dangerous, for on Thursday Cynthia steps out into life.

§ 13

THURSDAY comes and goes.

‘Come along, Cynthia, tell me how it feels to be launched in society !’

‘Well, my dear, the most awful moment of all was when about thirty of us were let through by an usher, and I knew that in a few minutes I would have to be making my famous curtsy to the King. It was a dreadful crush that smelt of soap and powder, and I squeezed myself up small and held my train over my arm.

‘Mother thought I was feeling collapsible—you know what she is—and she kept up a maddening stream of anecdote about King Edward’s first Court and how Queen Alexandra looked, and how everybody thought that bouquets were to be banned because they took up too much room. All the time she kept looking at me sideways to see if I was all right. I hate being watched. I began to feel that I was swelling, that something was coming down, or off, and that my nose was like a beacon fire. Isn’t it awful when people expect you to be nervous ? . . .

'Right in front of me was a handsome idiot in some kind of cavalry regiment, who was wearing everything but a spear. My dear, he clanked and he bristled with little sharp spiky Christmas tree decorations. A public danger! I knew that if he side-stepped his spurs would be all tangled up in me, and so I just squeezed up small and leant back on the chest of a fat little man. . . . It was most amusing! You know when the Underground trains are full up, and some one shuts the gate and they let you past in batches? You know? Well, it was like that, on a much grander scale, going on, say, in heaven.

'We were in the last antechamber! We could hear things happening in the Throne Room. One awful thing occurred. A débutante lost her chaperone! I don't know what happened to her, but any one feeling dramatic in Court dress is pathetic. Am I boring you?'

'Not much.'

'Well, I'll come to the exciting part. I was in the Throne Room. It was my turn next. For one second I felt like running away. You know how quickly your brain works when something like this is happening? I had a kind of swimmy vision of enormous chandeliers, scarlet carpets, flowers, crowds of satisfied people through an opposite door and the King and Queen standing in the centre of a perfectly gorgeous group.

'There were men in white satin breeches holding white wands. Some one took my card, and some one else, ever so neatly, took control of my train, spread it out on the floor, and I found myself walking towards the King. The King, the Queen, and Me! Everything seemed arranged for this. . . . I heard

my name read out. The Lord Chamberlain, who was standing on the King's left, announced me deliberately and had a good look at me. As I curtsied—and in the emotion of the moment I did a lower one than I'd been practising, and it came off marvellously—I had a sight of the King and the Queen that I shall never forget. He was in Life Guards' full dress, but, of course, you know all that ! The Queen was too gorgeous for words. She took my breath away. . . .

'I took two glides to the right, curtsied again, and the Queen smiled. You know that smile—it's simply lovely. It cannot be photographed. . . .

'I walked on : it was over ! I forgot my train till a page returned it to my arm. Then I looked back for a minute. Girls in white coming through that nervy door, being presented and coming on towards me, and round the King and Queen all kinds of amazing uniforms. . . .

'Then we went into the supper-rooms.

'All the old women were talking about their young days when they had to curtsy to every royalty on the platform and then back out, train and all.

'What did Mama say ? Well, when we got home she looked at me like an eagle regarding its young, and said, "Of course, you're awkward, my dear. All you young girls are !" which, of course, was great praise from her, and meant that I had behaved beautifully. . . .'

§ 14

EVERYBODY is there.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones and the baby, and Alfred and Ethel from Streatham, Lord This and Lady

That, and Gus Murphy the Canned Pork King, and the beautiful Mrs. Boston, wife of the Hair Tong Emperor. Every American in London is there, for the United States Army team is out to 'put it across' a Hurlingham side, and there is to be some fun. You can feel it in the air. And also on the air is borne the toneless twang of some one's lovely daughter, now and then a nice New England purr, and occasionally a 'Why, it's just dandy!' and a genuine F.F.V. laugh.

The great broad green polo ground, wide as an ocean of turf, close clipped as a tennis lawn, and sweet after recent mowing, divides the great crowd. On one side the white pavilion, packed with Hurlingham and its friends; on the other side high public stands packed with London's newest enthusiasts—those members of the public who have discovered the best game in the world. . . .

A bell tolls. . . .

The band of the Horse Guards, tucked away among a mountain of people, stops playing Chauve-Souris, pretty girls in their best Hurlingham-Ranelagh gowns cease to fascinate young men—yes, really—and a pony whinnies from the trees at the back. American army grooms take the rugs off four tense little ponies. English grooms give a last tug to the girths of four equally tense little ponies, the umpire mounts, fills his pockets with polo balls, and canters out into the field.

'Oh, daddy, which are the Americans?'

'Those four in white singlets!'

'And the Hurlingham team in light blue?'

'Yes.'

Crack!

Crisp across the field comes the first smack as the

umpire casts the ball among the eight dancing nervous ponies, and then . . .

Then ding-dong, hell for leather, for a solid hour, all the thrills of a cavalry war, all the speed of baseball, all the skill of football and cricket and tennis and hockey boiled down, concentrated and spread out like jam over an English field.

The white ball flies forward, the eight men after it ; it flies back and, quick as flashes, the little ponies turn and follow. Their eyes are on the ball, they prick their ears as if desperately anxious to catch the sound of it, to foresee its turns and twists. Men and ponies are one in this amazing chase of the white ball. There is a sudden bunch-up near the goal, a clicking of sticks, and the ball gets free ; an American gallops up and hits it towards the white posts, the crowd stops breathing, a Hurlingham pony leaps round like a cat, there is a flash of a polo stick, the goal is saved, and the crowd shouts its joy.

Then a gallop down field, a player well ahead with the ball, a race after him, a miss, he hits it a good smashing blow and—goal ! Then a bell calls them in ! The first chukker is over ! From beneath the trees eight fresh, prick-eared ponies are led out, and the eight little spring-heeled heroes of the first fight come trotting in with wet withers.

Look round ! Under the trees the first ponies are patted and congratulated by their grooms. They are being rubbed down and unsaddled and rugged-up and fussed. Now and again they twist their clever little heads towards the field as if following the fortune of that glorious mad battle, as if anxious to see how their pals are serving their men.

A groom pats them, rubs a hand over a velvet muzzle, and whispers something. . . .

The last chukker !

America 10, Hurlingham 6 ! Come on, Hurlingham ! The tense crowd hears above the thunder of drumming hoofs and the click of sticks sharp cries from the teams ('Leave it !'—'Take it !'—'Forward !'), and when the ball is hit to the line it sees a sudden rush of eight men, leaning in the saddle as they wheel, their faces shiny with sweat and their eyes wide with the crazy rush of the game.

Then a player gets away with the ball. Oh, well ahead ! See his pony all out after it, tail straight, head stretched, legs flashing ! Then behind him gallops another ! On he comes ! Full tilt. He overhauls him ! Gains on him yard by yard ! You can hear the hoofs drumming, see little clods of black earth torn up from the smooth turf, feel the miracle of mind and muscle that is driving those two out to head the ball. . . . Almost neck to neck now, flying, riding like furies, with the white ball just ahead. Then the second pony gallops level, presses its damp haunches into the first pony ; the men lean together, shoulder to shoulder, their polo sticks ready for a hit, and on they career, shouldering, pressing, their galloping ponies neck to neck, thundering over the turf on a loose rein, and then there is a swerve, the ponies part, the first player is ridden off, and the ball is headed back ! The team wheels round ready for another race, then . . .

Ding-dong ! Ding-dong !

The ball ! The game over ! America wins !

Little heroes of the polo field walk to stables, and what they say to each other as they nose their well-earned feeds I'll leave to you.

§ 15

OVER Epsom Downs a glory of sun, big clouds wheeling, yellow and green caravans with shafts in the gorse. . . .

A police sergeant stands with his thumbs in his belt, the advance guard of a great army of authority, directing the tent-makers and the carpenters to their places ; and when the gipsies are not looking at him he looks at them, as a dog looks at an uncertain cat. I alone, on that which will soon be the world's battlefield of hope, stand beside the winning-post, and wonder . . . wonder . . . wonder what half the world is wondering—who is going to win the Derby.

I stand there thinking of the thousands of pounds that will be lost and won among the dandelions, regarding the placid, empty stands, the white rails, the uneven switchback of the course, and the critical curve of Tattenham Corner. A little girl is picking daisies on the course ; there is a sound of hammering from the right, and from the left the tinkle of beer bottles unloaded from a van.

How dead the Derby course is, how difficult to realize that within four days they will be thinking about it in the Congo, in the back blocks of Australia, in the South Sea Islands—wherever there is a Briton to 'get up' a sweepstake ! How unconscious it is of human affairs ; the two butterflies that flicker low over the grass seem at that moment of more consequence than the unknown winner of the race.

I come out among the gorse bushes. As soon as I appear on the skyline there is a scattering round the nearest caravan, and I see a baby hurriedly given a place in the forefront of a sitting group of

women. I go on as if unconscious of the scene staged for me. Then, outstretched arms, a sudden dancing round me of ragged boys and the old cry :

‘ You’vealuckyficesir . . . yesyouavesir . . . aluckyficesir . . . crossthebabieshandwithsilversir . . . goon-sir . . . dosir . . . suchaluckyficesir . . . ’

I do then a totally unexpected thing which never fails to astonish the nomad ; I sit down calmly, facing them, and say not a word. The clamour dies at once.

The matron holding the baby narrows her eyes as she watches me, the four small, ragged boys slink to the caravan, and the two younger women look from the matron to me and back again. I feel that if I made a sudden movement the whole group would scuttle away. There is not a sound. Then I judge the moment ripe to win them. I tell the old lady (she was probably thirty-seven) that we are old friends, which is quite true. I remind her that the last time we met I had just been ‘ done out ’ of my rights, and that a ‘ dark stranger ’ was responsible. This she claims to remember. I then intimate that I am good for exactly half a crown (and not two and sixpence halfpenny), and very soon we are drinking exceedingly unpleasant tea. . . .

Yes, they’d come down from Nottingham, and Ethel is going to sell umbrellas. How she hopes Derby Day will be wet ! The matron will tell fortunes as usual, and some one referred to as ‘ him ’ intends to put up a coconut shy.

‘ You’ve got such a lucky fice, sir. I’d like to read your hand. . . . Ah, yes ; you had a big disappointment before you met the young lady ; but now you’ve married that’s all right, isn’t it, sir ? ’

I say it is.

A small boy, wearing what once had been a tall man's tail coat, appears from behind a bush, and remarks, 'Me father says could any one spare a pipe of tobacco?' One of the lads near the caravan throws a biscuit tin at the envoy, which means that the answer is in the negative. Some more women come out of the caravan: one named Agnes is not a real gipsy; she is having a holiday. Her real profession is fern-seller to the suburbs. She exchanges young aspidistras for old trousers. Then comes Kent and the hops, with the Derby in between, most profitable of all, when she retails a liverish brew of lemonade in a large fish tank. What a crew of varied commercial interests! Ethel praying for rain, Agnes praying for a thirsty day, and the rest ready for anything!

What Agnes would do without the Derby she doesn't know—straight, she doesn't! Ferns is no good, hopping is exhausting, but the Derby—that is something like, that is!

There is a clatter of hoofs. A score of shaggy ponies with manes tossing clatter over the road to the grass and, behind them, is something beautiful holding a switch cut from the hedge. She is about eighteen, red-haired, freckled and most adequately constructed.

'Damn your eyes, John!' she says, 'for letting them ponies——' Then she sees me, pauses, and sits down confused. Everybody laughs. She blushes. (I wonder how she would look in a Paris gown.) She lifts and drops her blue eyes. Her feet are in unlaced boots. It is difficult to realize how beautiful she really is. I wonder how she got there. She looks all wrong. That red and white beauty is surely a dangerous thing to trundle

round in a caravan. For one second perhaps I feel like King Cophetua, and then (how inartistic life is) I notice that her lovely neck is tidal. . . .

‘Give me a penny!’ shout the boys as I go.

‘Come back, can’t yer!’ snarls the old woman.

‘Let the gentleman go!’

Some kind of good breeding, I think, allows the parting guest to part in peace.

But that red head in the wood smoke! What a waste!

§ 16

Now for the Derby, that essence of England, that horrible, thrilling, amusing, revolting, exciting crush on Epsom Downs with the white-bellied clouds sailing across a sky tattered with kites, the air vibrating with the hum of Man in his thousands.

The Derby is like nothing else in the London year. As an experience it is unpleasant; as a sight it is unique; as a memory it is indispensable. On one side of the course rise the packed stands, tier on tier. A strip of green with whitewashed rails and beyond the rolling miles of men and women blotting out the furze bushes and the grass, rising and falling with the sweep of the downs; a crazy black pond of people from which rise up islands, in the form of grand stands, motor-omnibuses, motor-cars and the flimsy scaffolds of the bookmakers.

The monster has fifty thousand tongues in fifty thousand heads and a hundred thousand eyes and arms and legs. It twitches and writhes in uneasy movement and from it rises a bluish steam of tobacco and a steady buzz of sound, punctured now and then by the note of a cornet. This crowd cannot be

exaggerated, cannot even be described, cannot be seen in its completeness. It is like a moment in the history of a tribe's migration when, within sight of some promised land, the peoples have paused a while to wait with song, dance and jellied eel, the judgement of their god.

'It's terrific,' you say as your race-glasses move over the mass. 'There is nothing else like it on earth.'

'Isn't it a horrible monster?'

'Perhaps! It is vaguely repellent. It rather undermines one's faith in democracy; it is the essence of all incoherence.'

An old man who says he has witnessed fifty Derbys chips in with reminiscence:

'It isn't the show it used to be fifty years ago, when we all came down by road and didn't care when or how we got home. We were a jollier crowd. We cared less about the winner than the outing. I remember Barnum, just over from America, walking about with Tom Thumb under his arm draped in a shawl. In those days the Derby was a great national fair. On the way home there was dancing on the village greens till late at night, and the crowds gathered to watch the coaches go by with their postilions. Many's the time I've seen King Edward, when he was Prince of Wales, drive four fine blacks to Epsom and back again. Now, of course, the motor-car has altered the Derby as it has altered everything. We seemed happier people fifty years ago, or it may be that I was young then. Perhaps that's it!'

I decide to explore the free side of the course in the hope that the monster is more human at close quarters.

I am swept by a crowd against that most patient of all living things, the horse of a mounted policeman and, crab-wise, reach the Downs.

The place is suffocating. It smells of oranges and bodies. I think of Frith. But it is a better crowd than even Frith painted, an even more fantastic crowd, a crowd that really represents humanity, but in some way also humiliates humanity.

People say that Dickens was a caricaturist and that Rowlandson's people never really existed. Characters stranger than any known to Dickens go to Epsom every year ; men and women more extravagant than even Rowlandson painted shout and scream and lie on the grass and drink beer from bottles.

I come upon the tipsters. They stand, dramatically violent, in the centre of a ring of sheep-like faces. They behave like disreputable high priests of the god of Luck. One is dressed, I think, like a waiter. Then it occurs to me that he is trying to convey the impression that he has rushed to Epsom from some exclusive night club.

He behaves like a dancing dervish. He prances above the cap and raincoat that in other moments conceal his raffish attire and, flinging out his arms, asks that he might be struck dead that moment if his tips do not come true.

It is rather terrible ! I am saddened to see dozens of men and women fling shillings on the raincoat in exchange for his advice.

Another is dressed as a jockey. He crouches down in a fighting attitude with his head on one side, and appears to be addressing an invisible little man about two feet high who stands just in front of him.



THE FINISH OF



THE DERBY

He never looks at the crowd. He fixes this invisible little fellow with a threatening gaze, bullies him, and asks him questions, waits for an inaudible answer, snorts and sneers, and goes on :

‘Who gave So-and-so yesterday?’ he asks the invisible dwarf. ‘Me!’ He hits himself proudly on the chest and glares at the dwarf. ‘Who gave So-and-so on Monday? Me!’

Then he crouches down and, looking as though he would annihilate his invisible auditor, cries :

‘Did I ever let you down?’

He cocks his head on one side and glances inquiringly at the tiny ghost.

‘No!’ he answers for him. ‘And I never will!’

He turns and, sweeping away the little man with a gesture, glares at the crowd.

‘Come on now,’ he cries. ‘I’ll give you a week’s wages for sixpence! Come on now!’

And, strange to say, they do!

I am swept off with the crowd to a place sacred to sibyls. Dark women with gold ear-rings stand outside caravans and shout to passers-by. They all say that I have a nice face. I decide to let one tell my fortune. I find a queue of women outside the caravans and I am ashamed to join up. At length I come to a soothsayer who stands outside a motor caravan. She is at the moment unemployed. She says that I have not only a nice face but a lucky one! I gather from pictures outside the caravan that King Edward and Queen Alexandra were in the habit of going to her when in trouble or doubt.

‘A full reading is half a crown,’ she says, as we face one another over a little table in the fusty caravan. I dive in my pocket :

'No,' she says, 'I can trust a fice like yours, dearie.'

She then grasps my hand and says :

'You don't believe a word I sy, do you?' (I try to look believing.) 'You're a great judge of character, you are ! Have you had a disappointment? No? Then trouble. No? Are you likely to go over the water? Ah ; well, your forchune lies over the water.'

She holds my hand and suddenly shakes her dusky head until the gold ear-rings flash :

'You're too good-natured, you are !' she cries sadly. 'You give to those who wouldn't give to you. But you're prahd . . . you're prahd . . . you can't eat humble bread ! I can't say as you'll ever be wealthy, but you'll be independent to other people. Good-bye and good luck, my dear. . . .'

I climb down from the caravan vaguely disappointed. No dark strangers in my life ; no red-headed women !

On the edge of the enormous crowd I find a full-fledged fair in progress, complete with the fattest girl in the world, switch-backs, helter-skelters and countless peep shows.

Thousands of men and women are more interested in this than in the Derby. The fair sounds of trumpets and drums and raucous voices, the wheezy, ponderous, steam-driven music of merry-go-rounds, the shrill shrieks of girls on the helter-skelter, and the ping at miniature rifle ranges.

I have sixpennyworth of rifle practice. I knock five celluloid balls from the top of a jet of water in six shots ; which I think at least qualifies me for a coconut. They give me nothing but faint praise.

One booth advertises a cabaret called 'Life as

Seen in a West End Night Club'. I pay threepence and go in. About thirty men are standing in a tiny canvas tent which smells of tobacco and crushed grass. They gaze up at a good-looking girl who stands casually on a rickety stage, chewing gum. She is wearing a head-dress of ostrich plumes, an evening cloak of red velvet, and a pair of flesh-coloured woollen stockings rather slack over the ankles.

When she hears a critical remark from the audience she shifts the chewing gum to the other cheek and directs a withering glance at the speaker. All the time a voice outside bellows :

'Come and see the naughty girl from Gay Paree!'

When the tent is full the voice stops. The girl pulls a curtain in front of her. The man with the voice comes in and pulls the curtain away. The girl takes off the cloak, and stands in a statuesque attitude, wearing pink woollen fleshings.

The mouth of the statue still moves reflectively as she chews gum! It is all very dismal.

When I go outside a man with a voice like a fog-horn implores me to look at 'Hairy Mary'; another invites me to see the 'Fattest Girl on Earth'; a third is dying for me to see the boy with an elephant's trunk. But I suddenly realize that I have not seen a tattooed woman for twenty years. I put down my threepence and go in.

The same dull, sheep-like crowd of men, the same smell of tobacco and grass, the same bellowings from the neighbouring tents; the same awful tawdry catch-penny air; but I feel that it is all so important to any one interested in, say, drafting advertisements for toothpaste. These people have the pulse of the public.

The tattooed woman is built on the tonnage principle. She wears a pair of black knickers and a spangled toque. She takes off a coat and says :

‘Here on my left arm is Rule Britannia and on my right a Japanese gentleman. On my chest is the Mexican eagle and a Red Indian.’

Her body is a sort of League of Nations.

‘On my back’, she explains, turning round, ‘England and America are united.’

She then faces us with an indignant expression.

‘I regret’, she says, ‘that owing to the hypocrisy of certain people in the neighbourhood I can’t show you my legs ! But if you look at my tights you can see the blue showing through.’

A short-sighted elderly man with pince-nez walks up to the stage and peers at her solemnly.

‘That’s right, old dear,’ she cries, ‘have a good look.’

I fight my way back through the crowds to the other side of the course.

It is a few minutes to three.

From the paddock canter one by one the Derby runners. The note of the crowd drops an octave. The babel in Tattersall’s goes on as the bookmakers make the last-minute bets. Easy, long-legged, pulling, nervous, the horses, with their crouched jockeys like monkeys in coloured jackets, canter across the grass past the grand stand, where the King directs his field-glasses on them. The voice of the crowd leaps up again as the favourite comes along, his smooth gallop like the working of an oiled machine. They canter back and go far off to the starting-point. After them trail a remnant of the

multitude, a long, straggling line of running people led by one or two horsemen and horsewomen.

The voice of the crowd dins in the ears, the man with the cornet is playing something incredibly melancholy, the eyes of the grand stands are fixed on that far-off white gate where a line of colour breaks and wavers. Suddenly the voice of the crowd drops. The voices of the bookmakers become hushed. That line far off is steady. The multitude which till now was an incoherent horror becomes in this tense second united, takes to itself a brain and a thought, and in its throat is the desire to shout those two exciting words, 'They're off!'

The line of colour breaks and scatters and half the crowd roars these words; the other half does not, and there comes swiftly a blare of disappointment over the Downs. A false start! The horses trot back to the tape and the tense wait continues. Then . . .

'They're off!'

'They're off!'

That cry contains more thrill than anything in the racing year. It is the essence of excitement. It strings up the nerves. It rouses hope. It awakens fear. It stills the voice of the multitude.

The line of colour far off at the starting-point leaps into the distance. Horses and riders are lost for a moment behind the bodies of hundreds of thousands of massed men and women.

'There they go!'

A jet-black line of bobbing heads is seen against the distant sky, is lost again, is again found at the curve of Tattenham Corner. Now they enter the straight and are 'all out' for the finish.

Names are shouted and flung from point to point.

A L O N D O N Y E A R

The line of colour flashes on. The voice of the expectant pink monster rises jerkily, uncertain, almost angry.

No one will easily forget those crouching riders, the horse ahead, two more neck and neck, the thunder of hoofs, the flying clods of earth, and the voice of the crowd rising higher and higher, till, with a burst that rockets up to the clouds, the name of the winner crystallizes out of uncertainty.

So another Derby is over. Men and women shake hands like children, laugh, shout with pleasure, or, with philosophic smiles, start for home.

JUNE

§ I

THE King has a birthday on the third of June, and he rides down the Mall to receive the prettiest birthday present the army can give him—Trooping the Colour.

The Mall is an avenue of sunlight ending in a grey heat haze that flickers over Buckingham Palace. Crowds line each side of the road. The broad steps of Waterloo Place fill quickly with such a packed mass of men and women that you could not throw a pin between them. Round me is a marvellous crowd. There are two Americans, a number of women from the suburbs who know everything about Royalty, a few ex-soldiers, and a number of assorted Europeans. This is the sort of thing I hear :

‘Waal, say what you like, this country’s got a kick to it. You bet it has. . . .’

‘Do look, Alice, quick—there’s Princess Arthur alone in that car!’

‘Hi, Bill, who does that sergeant-major remind you of? Ain’t it old Whisky Willie to the life? See that slope, that’s the stuff to give ’em! How’d you like to be back in it, Bill? . . . I feel like that too. This is my old sergeant’s cane. I always take it out to these shows and, altho’ I’m a blinkin’ Socialist, if anybody said a word against the King I’d blinkin’ well knock him down. That’s that. . . .’

Listen! They are cheering lower down the Mall! By placing my face in half a pound of cold, indigestible cherries in a woman’s hat I catch a glimpse of fluttering handkerchiefs.

Then a section of silver and scarlet Life Guards

. . . then the King ! He rides a big white, mettlesome charger. He smiles. He raises his white-gloved hand to his black bearskin. Over his scarlet tunic is the blue ribbon of the Garter. On one side of him is the Duke of Connaught, on the other side is the Prince of Wales. A man in the crowd springs to attention and shouts :

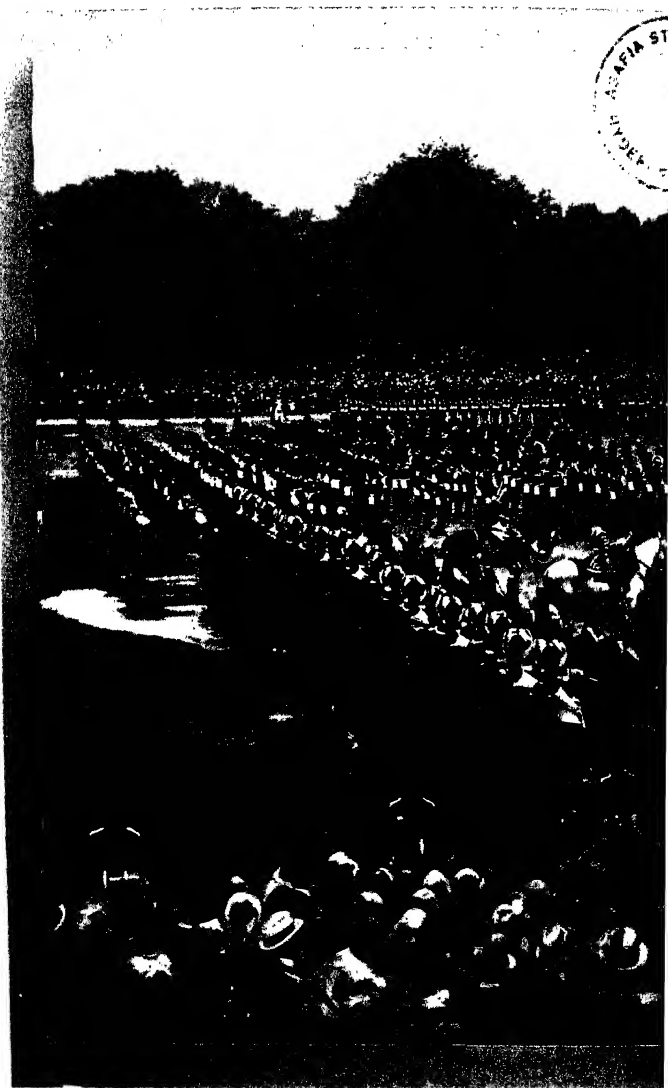
‘ Many happy returns, your Majesty ! ’

To a crisp clatter of hoofs comes the most gorgeous cavalcade of the year ; the Duke of York in his Air Force uniform ; Prince Henry in full-dress Hussar uniform, his charger saddled over a leopard skin ; the military attachés of the foreign embassies and legations, vivid alien uniforms, a Japanese Lancer, a Belgian cavalryman, a Spanish uniform, and sky-blue French.

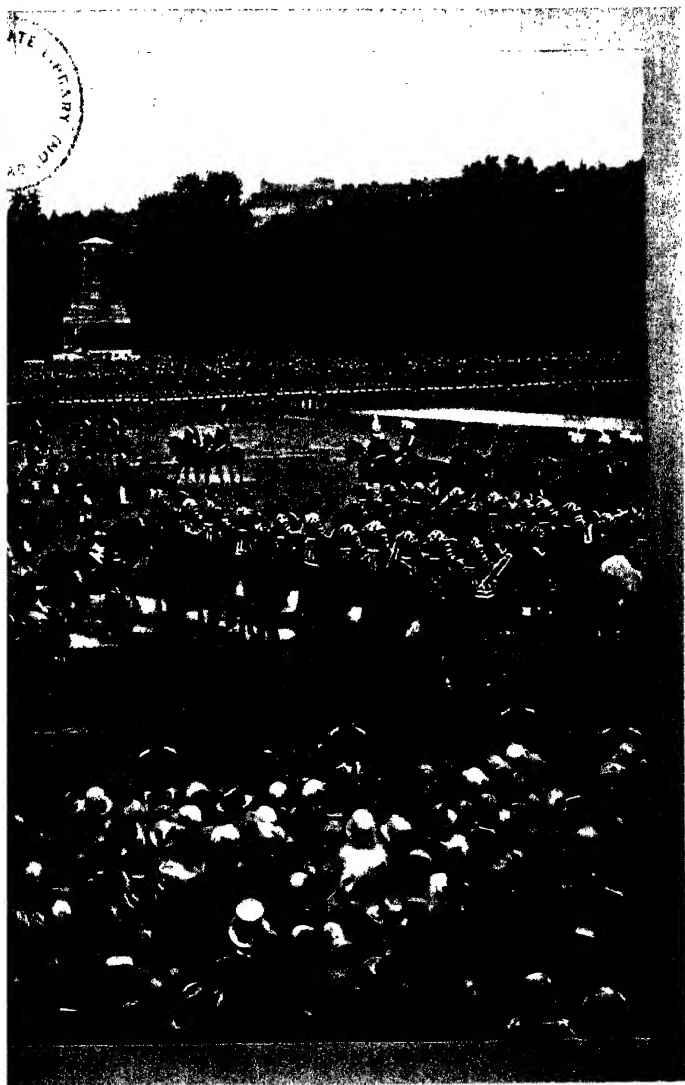
They pass on down the incline to the Horse Guards Parade, whence comes a rattle of musketry and a sound of drums.

In the sudden flux of the crowd I find myself with one of the Americans, and we share my binoculars. Through them we see the ceremony, far off through the trees, backed by the lovely grey and black buildings of the Horse Guards, with the Queen and Princess Mary and the Duchess of York watching from a canopied window.

The King on his white charger, on either side of him a rank of horsemen and, on the parade ground, company after company of Foot Guards ; the sun over naked steel ; the great blare of the massed bands ; the slow march, the solemn Trooping the Colour. Then the time changes. Quick march ! The troops pass the saluting base. First go the Life Guards with the soft tum-tumming of the cavalry drums and the tweedle of the fifes and wood wind,



TROOPIN



G THE COLOUR

then go the Foot Guards. Suddenly the marching ceases. The bands play 'God Save the King', the Colours are dipped to the dust. The parade is over.

'Say, now, what does all this link up with?' asks the American.

'George II,' I tell him. 'It's really the compliment of the Household troops to the Sovereign on his birthday. It's a kind of extra special version of the parade that goes on every day outside Buckingham Palace, St. James's Palace, and the Horse Guards. It just means that they salute the Flag in the presence of the King and, in a manner of speaking, parade their allegiance.'

'That's great stuff!' says the American. 'The darned wonderful thing about this country is that things mean something; there's something back of all this . . . something that gets you in the throat. Yes, sir. . . .'

The King places himself at the head of the Guards and is leading them back to the Palace. The Life Guards are going past!

'See those silver kettledrums on the fat drum horse? They were given by William IV! One of those bugles in the band sounded the charge at Waterloo. . . .'

The American makes incredulous noises, and I can see that he is 'tickled to death'.

The massed bands come crashing down the Mall. The King rides behind, leading the Guards, smiling to the crowds, touching his bearskin in salute. The troops pass. More horsemen.

'Look at that saddlery—the Grenadier Guards' saddlery—that was given to the regiment by the great Iron Duke!'

‘My!’ says the American. ‘This thing’s alive; it’s got roots! No wonder you people feel these things in your throats, and I’m mighty glad to have seen this—it helps to explain . . . means something . . . tradition . . . and I guess . . .’

I feel that he is about to become sentimental. He has the idea and, like a good American, he has it right between his teeth; and no one could have it better! So I say good-bye, and this perfectly good Republican then discovers that he has forgotten to replace his black felt hat!

§ 2

THE next day is the Fourth of June.

If you possess an Etonian in your family do not miss ‘the Fourth’, even though you may belong to Harrow. If you are a foreigner looking at England, persuade some member of the ruling classes to run you down with him, on the Fourth of June, to that lovely place where Windsor Castle on its hill looks over the Thames to the exact spot on which, we are assured on good authority, the battles of England have been won.

This is one of the most English events of the year; much more English than policemen, draughts, self-depreciation and the Cheshire Cheese.

‘Darling boy!’

Mrs. Smith whispers it. She sweeps up to a small pink figure on the station at Windsor and takes it for a second in her arms. The figure is Smith Minor! He wears a silk hat that looks like the legacy of a swollen-headed giant, and from the buttonhole of his funny little coat—a coat like an evening coat too young to have grown tails—springs

J U N E

a bloated carnation backed by a dell of maidenhair fern. His legs, increasing at the rate of four inches a term, are in quite inadequate striped trousers which departed from his bony ankles months ago with a gesture that drew attention to the fact that his navy blue socks have been repaired by a lighter shade of wool. He carries a singularly virginal pair of bright yellow gloves.

‘Darling boy!’

She whispers it as only mothers do; and Smith Minor, finding himself swiftly enveloped by arms and scent, turns pinker and looks round desperately. Heavens! Jones Major in the arms of a woman! Three lovely girls kissing Robinson, and all down the platform boys in silk hats plunging into shameless domestic affection as bathers take to the sea!

Then it is ‘done’!

He shakes hands with his father. Grey and rather grim that father, standing there in a pool of hot sun on Windsor Station this Fourth of June, this day that Eton assembles her sons, old and young, famous and unknown. Very grim. Perhaps forty years have fallen from him . . . perhaps he is hearing another woman say those two words—as only mothers do—to *him*: to *him* in a funny little coat, a big silk hat, his lean haunches in short striped trousers. . . .

More beautiful than the daughters of Babylon are the sisters of Etonians. In a foam of not much ninon, they surge so coolly and deliciously through the streets arm in arm with their own particular little black grub, or they pack themselves in victorias or in taxicabs, or they glide in long cars and, always, wherever there is a foam of lace or a flutter of silk

pleats, there, somewhere, is a pink-eared boy in a big silk hat, the focus of admiration !

A sun that might have been ordered for this day shines (with luck) over the Thames, makes your silk hat stick to your head, turns spats into red-hot annoyances, and causes the green shade of elms and the greyness of weathered stone to be cool and gracious things.

Through the corridors of Eton drifts an unaccustomed trail of perfume, the tapping of light shoes. Past walls carved with names, each name like a voice from the past, you go into Upper School where the Sixth Form, in knee breeches, render 'speeches' while you think pleasantly of luncheon. The inns of Windsor are loud with champagne corks as fathers act like men, and a flushed lordling in a tail-coat issues an invitation to tea in his rooms where, he confides, there will be iced coffee, strawberries, chocolate cake and ice cream. . . .

Through a rather bloated afternoon you stand with Smith Minor on Agar's Plough, and pretend to watch cricket.

But you will watch something else. Among the crowds you will see a noted admiral bow deferentially to a bent little country parson, and you have a shrewd instinct that the admiral used to fag for him and has not by any means forgotten ! You see old men light up as other old men peer at them and take their hands. . . . 'Do you remember ? Do you remember ?'

On this velvet-soft grass, with the elms throwing shade, the Thames, in the boyhood of its course, clear and limpid and fresh, Windsor Castle above a clump of trees towering in battlements, how many years fly away, how many men go backward in time

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and stand again in that golden age of life before realities began?

Smith Minor, full of strawberry ice but rallying gallantly, holds the mind to the present. A great day for him! In awed tones he points out his heroes, shyly he introduces his friends. Just watch the grimness go from his father's face as he shakes various small hands, and you feel that he is living over again everything Smith Minor says or does. A wonderful festival of Youth, with Age looking on, understanding it all, loving it all.

Then, with an evening mist mounting and the sun falling, the procession of boats, the crews in their quaint costumes, white duck trousers, beflowered hats . . . supper, fireworks! . . . It is now dark! From Fellows Eyot the trees look spectral; the night is warm and still as a night in Venice, sweet with the smell of grass and flowers. Suddenly lights tremble on the water. The sky lights up. In a flash you see the crowd standing there watching in the darkness. Then intense blackness again.

Smith Minor feels his father's hand steal out in the darkness and go about his shoulder. Curious! The strong fingers grip. So curious. . . . Such a grim, grey father.

Against the sky a green star burns for a moment and falls in the night.

§ 3

Two minutes after the doctor informs the head of a great house that an heir has been born, the butler is rushing off to Lord's to put the infant's name on the long waiting list of the M.C.C. (On his way back he may remember to drop in on the Registrar

of Births.) With luck the child is elected at the age of forty-five.

‘You don’t say!’ says the young American. ‘I guess this Lord’s Cricket Ground where we’re going is a kind of country club to the House of Lords. Is that so?’

I have to explain to him that the genesis of Lord’s had nothing to do with hereditary titles, that over a hundred years ago a man called Lord, realizing that it would be profitable to bring a field, a cricket match, and barrels of beer together, humbly laid the foundations of the most famous sporting institution in the world. I explain that butlers rush off to enter infants for the Marylebone Cricket Club at the earliest possible moment because there is a waiting list as long as eternity.

‘Well, I guess that guy Lord drew one of the lucky names in history,’ says the American. ‘I’ll say he had a hunch for founding things in this country; he simply couldn’t fail with a name like that. He might have been Robinson? D’you think he’d have put cricket over on a name like Robinson? I guess not. . . .’

We approach the gates.

Lord’s is looking incredibly like Lord’s. That emerald bowl of turf edged with darker trees, those glittering white rails, the pavilions, the startlingly clear, snow-white players, the batsmen, the umpires, slow, ruminating, in their long white coats, the pretty run of the bowler, the flash of his arm and, crack! the sweetest sound of June, the meeting of bat and ball!

In a circle round the field is the most delightful sports gathering in the world: an English cricket crowd. Keen, impartial, quiet and undemonstrative

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is your cricketer, and so varied. At Lord's you may find yourself sitting next to a parson or to a man who in the interval will talk learnedly of philosophy or art, or you may meet a soldier home from abroad who has made straight for Lord's in order to taste again the flavour of an English day. You meet the City man stealing an hour from the office, happy as a truant schoolboy at hearing the sweet peal of the pavilion bell when he should be behind his desk!

Slow and glorious is cricket, an antidote to the modern fever for speed, a dignified, clean game with a tradition behind it. As over follows over and the tension of the white field breaks, as the players change positions, the American absorbs the atmosphere:

'This is darned English!' he says. 'I've seen those old prints of guys in high hats playing this game. . . .'

'Do you like it?'

'You bet! I'm tickled to death.'

The game goes on into the lazy, warm afternoon. The crowd lies quiet under the spell of it, smoking its pipe, talking, between the overs, of W. G. Grace and the great ones of the past.

'Oh, well hit, sir!'

'Good shot, sir!'

Those cries now and then following the sharp crack of a hit ball. That is all.

I become aware that my young American is growing restless. He had taken a deep and intelligent interest in the opening of the game, but his attention is now wandering. Signs of obscure mental anguish pass over his face when a batsman is bowled and the field sits down.

'If they could only take it quicker!' he whispers,

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pulling his flat-topped hat well over his eyes and lighting a cigarette.

A shout goes up from the crowd.

'Gee, what was that? I wasn't looking! Darn it all, I've sat here since I was ten with my eyes glued to those white pants and nothing's happened! Then the minute I look at a blamed butterfly they pull off the only stunt of the day. It's not playing fair!'

Half an hour passes and I feel that it is not kind to keep him at Lord's any longer. An old man next to him has taken him in hand and is recounting ancient centuries. I catch the name of W. G. Grace.

'Bughouse!' whispers the American in my ear. 'He thinks he's been sitting here since 1875. Perhaps he's right!'

'Shall we go?'

'Sure thing,' he says happily. Then he turns back and mutters with a determined, set face:

'Gosh, I just hate being done down by anything. I wanter like this darned game, but I just can't. I don't get it. A bunch of wise-looking guys sitting around making polite alfresco tea-party noises to a funeral party in white ducks! No, sir, it's got me guessing. I'm sorry. There's something I don't see. . . .'

There is! But can you tell me how I might have made him see those sweet afternoons embalmed in every English heart when we, lying with the warm scent of crushed clover in our nostrils, watched in a breathless hush how the school was fighting—and two wickets to fall? Could I make him understand how we have all felt when, caught in some small meanness of youth, our fathers have solemnly told us, 'That's not cricket, my boy . . . that's not play-

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ing the game' ? Could I have explained that, no matter how old and dull we grow, we never quite forget what it felt like to wait in the pavilion with pads on, and then to walk out to that waiting field with a bat under our arm, our whole intense young being concentrated in a resolve to play the game ?

' It's in the blood, I expect,' I say lamely. ' We're brought up to it.'

' Well,' he replies thoughtfully, as we make our way out, ' I guess that's it. It trains you up to be a great nation, that's sure ! After the fatigue of watching that game a blamed war's just nothing. And that's a fact !'

§ 4

A TEA-PARTY in Mayfair. There is no escape in June. . . .

Three footmen move stiffly over the Aubusson bearing tiny, corpse-like sandwiches on silver trays. Some contain thin slices of tomato, others hold cress which falls out, giving a bucolic touch to your chin ; and some are inhabited by *foie gras*. A stern butler drifts about in the background like a Prussian general who is expecting reinforcements at any moment.

When you tell him your name, he conveys to you in some mysterious way that you are not the reinforcements expected. Nevertheless he magnanimously re-christens you in a loud voice, and under these false pretences you enter a room that smells of scent. There is a sound of tea-cups. People who have never before met are discussing unimportances with passionate insincerity.

As you walk in like an early Christian martyr a

well-upholstered woman disengages herself from a group of people who are pink with pretending not to bore each other. She is your hostess. She is dear Lady Maud Ffootle.

'I'm so glad you've come !' she says, and at the back of your mind you wonder if she knows who you are ! Then, with a gesture, she introduces you to the crowd and you feel like a child being compulsorily bathed. The men are either so old that they can say anything to a woman of thirty-five without being offensive, or so young that everything they say is questionable. You retreat therefore to a couch covered with women where, holding a cup containing some good aromatic tea and a slice of lemon, you assume a sort of mordant gaiety as you nibble a sandwich and say 'Splendid !' before the person telling the story has reached the point of it.

'His Grace the Bishop of Boom !'

The butler's voice seems to be wearing a rich cope. You realize that the advance guard of those reinforcements has arrived ! The bishop, exhaling a plump joy, walks into the mob like a black Buff Orpington and has soon shaken off everybody but the prettiest girl in the room.

'Lord Boodle !'

This time the butler's voice is trimmed happily in ermine ; and you know that the anticipated reliefs have arrived.

Just as your wandering wits are returning and three handsome semi-detached women obviously think you the wittiest thing in creation, your hostess sweeps up and with the air of confiding that a guest has forgotten to put on trousers (but will you be darlings and forget it because he's eccentric ?)

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whispers apologetically that Poppy Delane, the actress, is about to recite verses composed by her when she was touring in America. Every one feels that nothing could be more awful, yet each says 'How delightful!', puts down a cup, and assumes a tense, attentive expression.

Poppy Delane darts a side smile at the bishop and walks to a clear arena before the fireplace. She is lovely. Adorable! (How you hate her!) She smiles in the unhealthy silence, raises a hand, and seems listening to an inaudible bird. Then she recites.

You feel that you must keep a tight hold on yourself. The poem is like a frenzied assault on your sense of humour. How ghastly if you should go mad and begin to dance by yourself, or start to undress. What a poem!

America, America, land of the free,
Blazoning hope from sea to sea,
O land of opportunity . . .

It becomes worse and worse. You find yourself aching to roll on the floor or creep under a table, but instead you gaze into Poppy's eyes with a peculiar intensity which gives her the insane impression that you alone of all men understand and appreciate her art. With a passionate gesture she addresses the next stanza to you, so that, hating to be embroiled in any way—even by mistake—you swiftly shift your eyes and find yourself looking at an abandoned cress sandwich with a yearning wistfulness, as if you were about to propose marriage to it. By thinking hard of cress you manage to control your emotion . . . cress, running water, country lanes, waving greennesses under the water, the post-

man cycling down the muddy road, the parson in a dog-cart. . . .

'Bravo!' some one cries. 'Bravo!' Thank heaven, Poppy has finished! There is a rustle of mild applause. The bishop welcomes her back as he might be expected to welcome a distinguished convert; Lord Boodle's monocle falls with a tiny tinkle to his waistcoat and he ceases giving an imitation of a sentimental cream bun. Everybody relaxes. It was the longest ten minutes of their lives.

The conversation leaps up again in splendid insincerity. People are playing conversational ping-pong. You resolve to stand up, button your morning coat, unobtrusively shake the trouser leg that always hitches up over your left spat and retreat in good order, but, alas! dear Lady Maud advances to you over that Aubusson prairie. There is no use in pretending to take cover. You are in for it; you are about to encounter Number One of the June Crop of Performing Seals.

'I want you to meet Boris Grubbski—you two will get on well!'

You try to grip a hand that feels like a pound of warm filleted plaice, and behind the hand is a limp body and a pair of dopey Slavonic eyes which make you wish that you had brought a gun. He may be twenty or thirty. It is impossible to say. There is a faint whisper of amber. His eyes drape you in velvet for a moment, he adopts a relaxed attitude, shakes a lock of dank hair from his forehead and, without any decent preliminary, begins mentally undressing himself. He tells you about his soul and prods around in it as urchins grub in rubbish heaps on waste land.

'You believe in reincarnation?' he says intensely.

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'I know!' He sighs and nods his head. 'I am a very old soul.'

('A very rotten old soul,' you think.)

'And so are you,' he remarks, shaking that Medusa head.

('If', you wonder, 'I threw a tea-pot at him, what exactly would happen to this lovely tea-party?')

The long room glows with afternoon sunlight and is sweet with a movement of green leaves through open windows. Midmost in the throng of women is dear Lady Ffootle, a lovable soul if ever there was one, a childless woman who, in default of the normal target for affection, must mother the entire universe. She is like a searchlight that, denied the object of its focus, shoots out over the sky. One little pink baby could have stopped all these tea-parties years ago, could have denied the Society for the Conversion of Chinese Carpenters, the Society for Providing Steam Heat in Iceland, the Overcoats for Stray Cats' Society—and many more—large annual cheques. But no; she is doomed to move on in intolerable sweetness. I often wonder when she will provide the worms in her lawns with little hot water bottles (poor darlings!). She is the charity secretary's dream of heaven.

Her mind, like one of those annoying Japanese glass harps, tinkles to every wind that blows, particularly from the direction of the Steppes—'So pathetic, my dear, such lonely, locked-away people, such pent-up sorrow, such is-ness, such was-ness.'

Hence frequent versions of Boris. . . .

There is an expectant rustle from the assembled women. Big hats, little hats, turn the way of Boris, tea-cups in white hands, and through the room

passes the unavoidable knowledge that he is about to perform. Dear Lady Maud leads him to a grand piano, hovers a moment, fussing. Boris runs his hand through his hair, moons at the reverent women, and finally strikes the piano with quite surprising hatred. Rachmaninoff! Brahms! Quite good; but not better than they do it in any London music school every day. At the final chord the nervous hands fall from the keys, a pallor spreads over the artist's face, and he subsides into a soft chair and takes a cup of tea with the wan smile of an invalid. In a corner a famous vaudeville magnate, cornered by altruistic Lady Ffootle, lies gallantly:

'Gorgeous!' 'Magnificent!' 'Oh, my dear, what expression!' All this from the scented rustle! You long to bleat, but this is one of those uncritical, mesmeric moments when it is not worth while telling the truth!

'Amazing fellow!' you say quickly to every pair of burning eyes you encounter. Then:

'Hallo, Joan!'

'Hallo! What an awful young man!'

'How did you guess? Women never seem to size up these things.'

'Oh, but don't we? My dear, he cornered me, looked at me lusciously, and told me he never could love any woman for more than twenty-four hours.'

'What did you throw at him?'

'I inferred that he was generally flung out long before his affection had time to develop.'

'Why do you come to these affairs?'

'Who wouldn't back up dear Aunt Maud? If she took up performing fleas and had them loose I'd come; and so would you!'

Then the face of the genius looms before you.

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He is bearing down on you, wearing a buttered smile. He wants you to know some more about his soul ! As he approaches he seems to tear off a spiritual coat and waistcoat and wave them in the air. In a moment he will be undressed again, trying to have a Turkish bath in your polite sympathy.

‘ Good-bye, Joan ! ’

You dodge him, reach the door, long for a custard pie, and dive down the steps into this mad world.

§ 5

ONCE every June the Richmond Horse Show gives us the chance of pretending that once we hunted twice a week and lived the only sane life for a man ; with a trout stream to fish, a horse to ride, and a dog to love, and . . . well, that’s surely enough ?

As soon as you enter the gates and walk out on the grass at Richmond, London might be a hundred miles away. You might be in the heart of green Warwickshire, on one of those lovely, slumbersome afternoons when the horse show is held in a paddock and all the farmers and their lads and all the girls and men from country houses are mixed up in a delirious horse-worshipping mass dominated by the spare, straddle-legged figure of his lordship with a pink carnation in his shooting-jacket and a straw in his mouth, feeling fetlocks, rubbing hocks, generally having his own way, ruling the roost as he rules the hunting-field.

The joy about the Richmond Horse Show is that it might be taking place in Somerset or Devon. It brings a breath of the shires to this sophisticated city. It is true to type. It is the prettiest, most

happy-go-lucky open-air lounge in the London season. You pay your money and sit round waiting for something to happen. As soon as you arrive you 'get' the atmosphere. Even the Cockney chauffeurs who have run down with cargoes of Mayfair begin to look a bit like Tom, the stable boy who was always so clever at engineering !

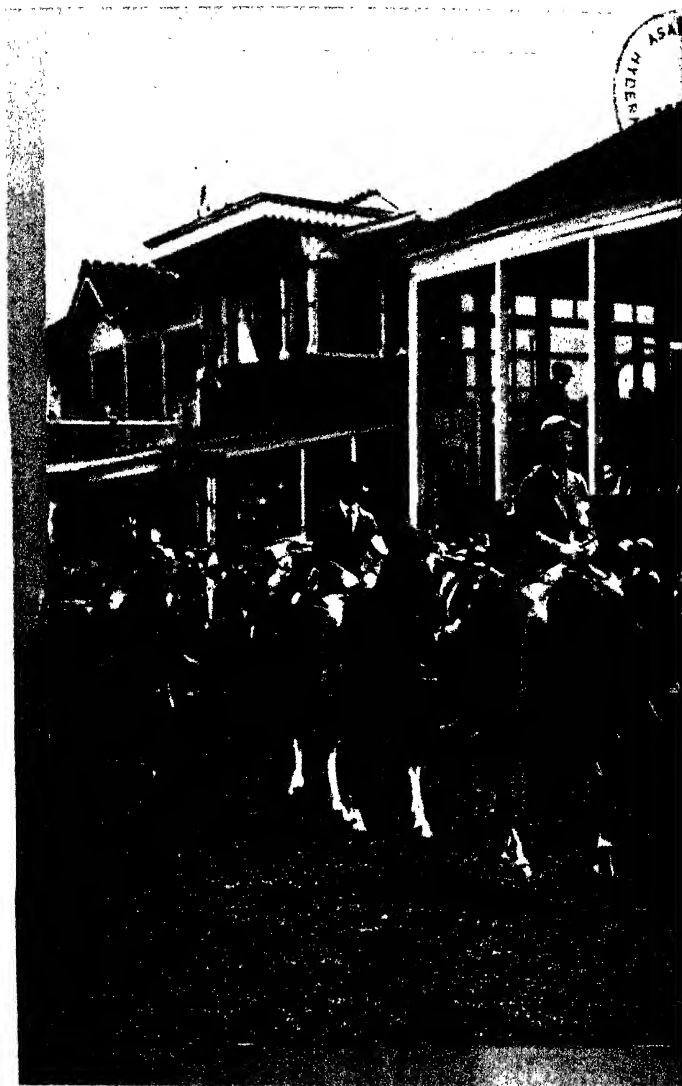
It is terribly hard work to make the Richmond Horse Show seem like a society function. There are too many good horses, too many country cousins, too many bandy-legged grooms and sharp-faced men in white stocks. A silk hat here and there, a white Ascot 'topper', Lady So-and-so (in a flutter of green pleats) and the beautiful Miss So-and-so (in a flutter of apricot pleats) look smart and attractive ; but—who cares ? This is a horse show. All you desire to see is the red rosette pinned to the right head collar !

Everywhere you look, everywhere you go, you meet our lovely country cousins wearing their riding breeches. A girl in riding breeches and boots is either one of the most beautiful sights on earth or one of the most regrettable. She can, if she has thin legs and the right cut boot, look like every man's ideal girl, the kind of girl for whom he would adore to open every gate in every field in every county in England ; on the other hand, if she is fat and knock-kneed ; but why brood on this ?

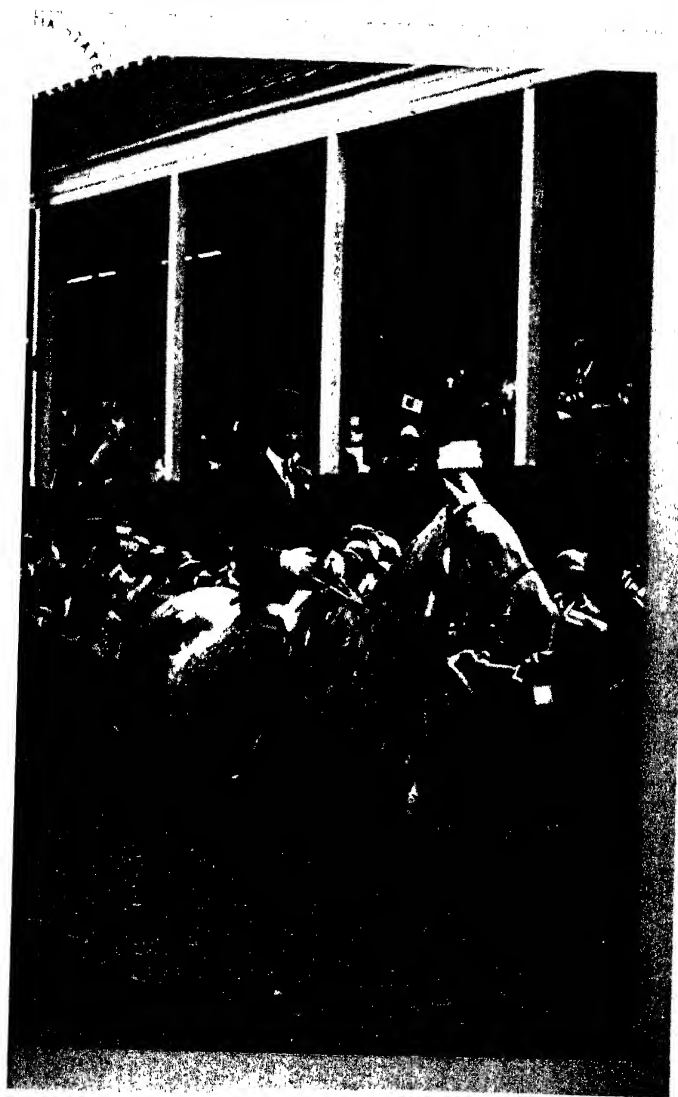
Come ! something is happening in the ring. . . .

You lean over the rails with a crowd from Taunton, Ayrshire, the Cotswolds and Park Lane, watching twelve little girls on twelve little ponies walk, trot, and canter past the judges. Deliciously composed infants, the ponies in scale with them, little women on little horses.





AT THE RICHMOND



ROYAL HORSE SHOW



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Then the single harness ponies ! See them leaping as if they would shatter the frail racing buggy, see them change step, get into their stride, and with heads up and legs stepping—legs on springs—stride off over the turf. Such perfection, such a display of swift energy. In the middle of this sounds the mellow call of a coach horn. The coaches which have been allowed sixty minutes from the Magazine in Hyde Park are coming in ! The sun gleams on a lemon-yellow coach body. Far over among the trees there is a blur of red, the coat of the ‘ guard ’, the light gleams on the smooth chestnut flanks of the team and slowly, heavily over the turf, comes the first coach with a bright jingle of harness. . . .

You go through the long marquee called ‘ stables ’.

Grooms, fussier than any lady’s maid, are winding fetlock bandages or unwinding the cloth from tails pulled as only an English groom can pull a tail. In one box a girl in riding breeches and a white dust coat is whistling as she runs a hay wisp over her horse. What a delight it is in this weary world of garages to hear the pretty sound of a curb chain rubbed in chamois leather.

Soft muzzles are pushed through the box sides, deep-lashed eyes gaze at you mildly, as if such fussing and brushing and bandaging were a peculiar trait of humanity which must be tolerated. Then the time comes when a horse is saddled and led out. His mistress mounts him ; and off they go into the arena to try their skill, to match their points.

You, who must return to the city, linger pathetically round the tailors’ stall, finger a shooting stick, feel a Bedford cord and, quite against your will, tear yourself violently away from a man who very nearly sold you a pair of brown Jodhpur breeches.

There is something about horses and horse shows that *always* pulls you back to the land !

§ 6

ONCE in every three years the ' executioner ' of the Tower of London walks out with the headsman's axe over his shoulder.

It was about noon. Tower Bridge was crowded with traffic. Tower Hill was a mass of lorries and vans. The policemen held up the traffic. Faces appeared at every window. There was a flash of scarlet and gold.

' Hi, Bill ! What's this ? ' the carters asked one another as they stood up to see better.

' They're going to cut off somebody's blinkin' head ! ' was one answer ; for the sun caught the polished surface of the headsman's axe as it rested on the shoulder of the Yeoman Gaoler.

Behind, two by two, walked the Warders of the Tower in full dress : scarlet tunics, scarlet breeches, scarlet stockings and Tudor bonnets. There were rosettes of red and white and blue in the bonnets, at the knees, and on the toes of their shoes. Each man carried a halberd.

The Yeoman Warders were ' beating the bounds ' of the Tower ' Liberties ', as they have done for centuries at intervals of three years.

I was invited to beat the bounds with them. I arrived at the Tower and found the grey old fortress full of delighted children. Every child who lives in the Tower of London has a holiday from school once in three years in order that he, and she, may go and hit the boundaries with a willow switch.

First we went to church. After the service we

filed out and formed up near the block on Tower Green. The boys and girls were lined up, and to each was given a wand of peeled willow.

The Chief Yeoman Warder placed himself at the head, carrying the Tower Mace, a long pole on which is set a silver replica of the White Tower. Next came the choir of St. Peter ad Vincula. They had new mortar-boards. Each lad wore a stiff little Elizabethan ruff over his white surplice. There were the clergy, then a guard of Yeoman Warders, led by the sinister-looking headsman with his great shining axe, then the visitors, then the Constable and the Governor ; then the wives of the Tower, and, finally, more Warders.

When we emerged on Tower Hill the crowds rushed at us in astonishment. They formed a critical lane through which we passed. One of the first boundary marks was almost opposite the Tower let into the wall of a warehouse.

‘ Now, whip it, boys ! ’ ordered the Chief Warder.

Twenty lusty young boys hurled themselves on the stone and lashed it with their willow wands.

This custom of beating the bounds goes back to Saxon days. It is mentioned in the laws of Alfred and Athelstan. Some say that it is even older. It has been traced to the Roman festival in honour of Terminus, the God of Landmarks.

We went on and beat a boundary mark opposite the Mint. We marched down to the very shore of the Thames below Tower Bridge and hit a stone that was just above the tide level. We found one of the last boundary marks in a small out-house under Tower Bridge. We entered it and whacked the stone soundly ; and then we returned to the Tower, having hit thirty-one stones.

So we made the Tower of London safe for another three years.

§ 7

ASCOT !

I have been to Ascot in Lady Dingleberry's car and once, most conspicuously, in Colonel Blood's yellow four-in-hand, but the greatest fun of all is to go in a pair of old flannel trousers on the free side of the Heath.

How can I make you see that wonderful comedy of changing scene? If only I could paint! In a tent I watch a woman with three chins eating frozen salmon from a tin plate. In a corner of the tent two babies with hot, red faces are asleep with a sack flung across them, their yellow hair lying among crushed daisies. A man comes in and takes up a pint pot of red ale. He lifts the pot and pours the ale down his throat. You can see it going down. His eyes goggle over the brim at people. Then he puts the pot down empty.

'Salmon's good to-day!' cries the fish merchant, picking up great chunks of it, slicing it, and placing it on tin plates.

'Who says jellied eels?' yells his rival outside.

A man with his face painted black comes in, flings out one arm dramatically, and begins to sing in an incredibly vile voice :

'I per-assed by your wi-in-dow
When the morning was red.'

Somebody tells him to come back in the evening, but he is taking no hints. He clears the tent, and is succeeded by a blind man led by a little white

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wisp of a woman. The blind man begins to sing, but the woman touches his sleeve.

'Save yer voice, dear, save yer voice!' she says. 'There ain't nobody here.'

And this is Ascot, fashionable Ascot! Over on the other side of the rails, the royal enclosure is slowly filling; the green lawns are dotted with bright parasols.

Outside in a blaze of light is the blare of a crowd. Something happening on every yard of earth. Tipsters! What a study in persuasion!

'Money?' cries one seedy-looking fellow. 'It's nothing to me . . . nothing . . . just dirt! I don't want it! I only want to put you people right. . . .'

And a row of stolid faces comes a step nearer.

'Ere, catch this!' cries another, as three half-crowns flash through the air. 'I've got a lot more where that came from.'

'Jockeys?' says a third in a voice of infinite contempt. 'Some tipsters call themselves jockeys, come 'ere dressed up like chorus girls with two left-hand leggings on! Jockeys! And you believe them! You fools. . . .'

Quite near a husband and wife are in the course of an argument. Would the baby in a tin bath elicit greater sympathy from passers-by here by the tent door or over there beside the road?

One o'clock! The crowds press at the white rails opposite the royal enclosure. Women in hundreds! The hot sun beats down. The note of an arriving coach-and-four! A man sells ice bricks, another advertises the contents of a tin bath on whose bilious waters float sliced lemons . . . and a constant babble from the crowd.

'That's where the "big pots" are, Mary!'

'Ow, don't they look lovely? All lords, 'spect!'

'Lords?' says a man's voice in deep scorn.
'Dooks! Most of 'em is dooks.'

'Go on!' says a woman.

The elegant people from the other side of Ascot continually cross the course on their way to club tents. They plunge into the hearty crush.

'Oh, ain't she lovely! Look at this one coming in the grey dress. Oh my, she forgot to put on a petticoat! If the Queen sees that she'll be turned away!'

This causes a sensation! The speaker is asked to explain.

'They're awful strict!' she says. 'Once Queen Victoria—or was it Queen Alexandra—saw a lady as she could see through and she called her up to the royal box and gave her a real old dressing down . . . told her off proper, she did. Said, "We are not amused." That's how they talk, you know—We! And the lady left in disgrace!'

A large woman standing next to me whispers, 'They've got it all wrong, but I never argue with people!'

I look at her, and think how lucky it is for people that she never argues. She is like three prima donnas in one. There are no sleeves to her enormous knitted jumper and her arms, like the legs of a giant which have been vaccinated by a mad doctor, terminate in hands which hold a ridiculous, small paper fan.

'Lovely sight, ain't it? Some folks say it ought to be done away with, but—I never argue. You must have a head to everything, mustn't you? That's nature. I like a head that's worth looking at—ow, here they come!'

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With a soft whirr of wheels going over turf and a faint sound of bits jingling the King and Queen drive up . . . scarlet and gold . . . grooms in Ascot livery . . . more carriages, and the Standard falling from the mast over the royal box.

So Ascot begins.

In the royal enclosure opposite, the foam of soft dresses surges and breaks round the curving steps, pretty women put up parasols of pink and green and red. On the Heath side of the course the man with the lemons cries :

‘ Who wants a cooler. . . . Come on, now, a cooler ? ’

And over the green heath the great crowd moves and alters and eats and drinks and speaks its mind with more force than elegance ; every part of it amusing, every bit worth looking at—a royal enclosure of humanity.

§ 8

On a hot June day, when London is airless and bad-tempered, there are two ways of spending a day on the river. This is one of them.

The long, low, touring car purrs into Maidenhead with the dust of its flight from London over it. Loungers in the bar at Skindle’s observe, as it pulls up, an admirable peach-coloured limb in the act of descending. Then its companion ; the famous legs of Poppy Sweet, of the Stupidity Theatre. There is no *matinée* to-day.

He barks sharply, and the head-waiter jumps to obey him. A corner table for two with a view of the river ! Poppy enters the dining-room with an air which makes you feel the absence of music to be a

grave error. One or two people recognize her, and she bestows her face-cream smile on them. He follows behind like a lamb. Two waiters bow and the wine waiter lurks in the background. Poppy clasps her over-manicured hands and, resting the tip of her delicious chin on them, gazes intently at him from the shade of her fashionable little hat. Yes, canteloupe melon, salmon, chicken, iced asparagus, and a *pêche Melba*, and—‘Do let’s have some bubbly!’ Instead of rapping Poppy over the knuckles and telling her that only . . . however, he orders a bottle of Pol Roger and looks out over the river. (It really is a lovely day!)

The meadows are freckled with kingcups, meek cows stand in lush grass, a big, white swan moves slowly out of the reeds by the river bank. But he sees nothing of this. He is not allowed to.

‘And would you think these pearls are real, Jim?’

‘Yes, of course I would,’ he lies.

‘Well, that’s funny—they are! How did you guess? Bertie gave them to me. Shall I marry Bertie? No; do tell me. How would you like me as Lady Spindleberry? He’s proposed three times, but he’s such an awful idiot, and I cannot trust him out of my sight. . . . Isn’t this melon heavenly? You know, you’re rather a dear. . . . Shall I tell you what Gracey said the other night? No, I won’t! Yes, I will. . . .’

(She wriggles in her seat and leans across with her pretty chin among the roses. . . .)

He begins to wish he had not brought Poppy. Her conversation is like a dripping tap. She has a horrid habit of talking about people he has never met, of frightening him horribly by confiding in him.

(Apparently every fellow in his club has proposed to her!) He looks at her over the rim of his glass, admires the curve of her neck and the injudicious brilliance of her eyes, at the same time thinking that she is rather like a Red Indian waving scalps. He puts his hand instinctively to his head and smooths his hair. Why didn't he run down alone and lie in a punt with his pipe and a tin of tobacco? Would it be possible to get her away in a boat and make her interested in butterflies or cows or water-lilies? How surprising that at least six men in the room are envying him. . . .

'And then I said to Arthur, "Arthur," I said, "you think you're pretty smart and all that, but if you think I was born yesterday, my lad, you're very much mistaken." Then Milly chipped in. You know that way she has of talking as if she was chewing tin tacks? Well, she screwed up that ugly little mouth of hers and said . . .'

So it goes on till the long touring car takes the road to London, its exhaust opening occasionally like a deep oath. That is one way of spending a day on the river. This is the other.

He comes down to the boat-house in the delicious, rather secret little village of Bray, carrying a basket. She also carries a basket. They both look so happy that the red-faced old punt merchant smiles and becomes almost sentimental. He gives them his best new punt.

'Now, my lass, remember we're broke, and if you squash those strawberries we can't afford any more. . . .'

She stops, horrified, and her thin, pleated skirt, swaying, pays a compliment to her grace. She looks

at him, puts the basket in the punt, points an accusing finger :

‘You extravagant thing, Bill ! Strawberries !’

They find their way to a back-water, a delicious green shade where the trailing willows lock them in ; the water laps against the punt ; it is such fun opening the paper bags, the Thermos flask, the squashy sandwiches in greased paper. A cool wind flutters the leaves. It is tremendously good to be alive. They paddle out of the green pavilion. He lets her take the punt pole, just for the joy of watching her swaying above him ; his lazy mind fastens on the delicious way her gold bangle slides on her bare arm as she brings up the pole, on the beauty of her hands as she straightens her hair. He thinks she is the most marvellous thing that ever happened, and he would like the punt to sink so that he could save her life.

‘Mary, tell me—are you glad we’re going to be married ?’

‘Oh, Bill . . . oh, stop ! That man saw us !’

They go back in the dusk with the white moths fluttering and the swifts cutting the warm air like black darts. There is a glow in the sky, the herald of a honey-coloured moon.

‘And you think that Jacobean for the dining-room, dearest ?’

‘Yes, Mrs. Everybody !’

‘And blue paper and saffron cushions ?’

‘And you listening to the sound of my key in the lock, and me coming in with a pearl necklace to tell you that since I took the correspondence course in accountancy I’ve been made general manager.’

‘Silly !’

‘Not a bit ! Why, when we’re married I’ll work

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like . . . Oh, here we are ! Isn't it awful the way time flies. . . . Hold on, there's a little silver moth in your hair. . . . ?

Dick Turpin, of the boat-house, smoking his pipe, looks at the clock, looks at them, opens his mouth to say something nasty, and then—how strange !—decides not to remember that they are late and consequently owe him at least five bob !

Such is the power of love—or is it just June magic ?

§ 9

A MAN in a bottle-green coat lifts a coach-horn to his lips in Olympia and sounds a silver-sweet tan-ta-ra.

Into the arena comes a neat, young Italian officer in waisted smoke-grey tunic and shining patent leathers, riding a big-boned bay horse. Through the audience passes that flutter of excitement like wind going through leaves, that delicious thrill that comes only once a year with the International Horse Show.

It is a flutter composed of girls saying, ' How smart the Italians are ! I love their dear little caps, or are they shakos ? ' and another kind of girl saying, ' That's a good-lookin' horse, that is ; a real lepper, as we say in Ireland,' and a deeper mutter from men trying to judge the new competitor's chances of jumping that stiff course of gates, hedges and walls dotted round the tan.

The Italian collects his horse, and his horse knows that he is being collected. He seems to realize that it is up to him to fly over those jumps with a clean pair of heels, as he had so often done at home at Tor di Quinto. He is ' up against ' the cavalry of England, Sweden, France, Belgium, and Poland ; and

the Duke of Connaught in the royal box has his eye on him !

Off he goes, a magnificent, anxious thing, breathing deeply, the man on his back nursing him to the first box jump. Up ! Done it ! Then the next ! He takes a bar jump like a flying bird. The scarlet-coated grooms standing round the jumps wink at each other. This fellow is going to stay the course ! The bay horse faces a stone wall. He doesn't like it. He shakes his head and his eyes distend. He does not trust these English walls ! However, he gallops up and seems rather surprised to find himself on the other side ! The audience muffle a rustle of applause. A five-barred gate is in his path, a beastly gate, the kind of gate that keeps people from being killed by trains. He rushes it. He jumps it, but, in jumping, his rear nearside hoof kicks down a tiny little white bar of wood, hardly bigger than a child's brick.

How demoralizing ! He shakes his head and goes off to his last fence. His man lets him out ! He releases some reserve spirit or fire that he has been saving up, and the big bay thunders up to the last gate, takes off, clears it, and canters out of the arena, where two excited Italian Army grooms wait to lead him to stables. . . .

Once more the bottle-green horn-blower sounds a note. Other riders canter in and go over the jumps with skill and good fortune, or else they hear behind them the humiliating crash of falling gates.

I have seen the Grand National many times, but I have not been as thrilled at Aintree as I am at Olympia when they jump for the King's Gold Cup. Here are all the thrills of a big steeplechase compressed, as it were, for a London afternoon. You

could sit for ever watching the varied riders, aching for their victory, condemning their faults with the easy air of a spectator, admiring so often the sympathy between man and beast, and liking the fellow who goes off patting his horse, especially when the horse has let him down badly.

Then, of course, there is Lord Lonsdale. The sight of him in the most waisted frock coat of the year, a cigar like a young coach-horn in his mouth, moving with a debonair air between pink geraniums with a trayful of rosettes, is a sign that the London season has reached its crest.

There are neat young women in riding habits showing off themselves and their horses, and young men from all the counties of England who ride round Olympia with a something about them that makes you see the ghost of a pack behind them and a pale sun rising over a hill early on some fresh, cub-hunting morning.

Afterwards you go through the stables.

Long heads are pushed over horse-boxes in your direction. Long ears are raised at you. Now and then a velvet muzzle desires to be rubbed. Now and then a testy visitor who does not agree with Olympia and such-like showing-off, lashes out in that which he takes to be your vicinity; but, mostly, it is an affair of soft whinnies and nose-rubbing.

'Pazienza!' says the big-boned bay Italian to the little chestnut Belgian. 'I wasn't myself to-day. Music always gives me the creeps. You wait till next time. I'll show you!'

'And did you ever see anything so lovely as we are?' say the little harness ponies that go high-stepping round the tan, each one like a reflection

of the other, perfect in movement, in size, in colour, in gloss. . . .

But what I like best—as I have said before—is to hear a man whose horse failed him whisper, ‘Never mind, old girl ; you did your damndest, but—you can do better at home ! Only you and I know that !’

The answering nose rub seems to offer him the usual regrets, and somewhere in those deep eyes is a promise to ‘pull it off’ next time.

§ 10

THE King sits in a chair at Hendon when the Royal Air Force holds its noisy pageant and he speaks a few words into a box. ‘Hello, Mosquitoes ?’ he says, as though he were speaking over a telephone. ‘Hello, Mosquitoes ? Alter course sixteen points outwards !’ Then he looks up into the air, and a hundred thousand people look up also. . . .

They see, black against a windy sky, a fighting squadron of nine swift aeroplanes. The drone of their engines is steady and monotonous as a dentist’s drill. They boom and throb through the air, four to the left, four to the right, and the squadron leader behind. As soon as the King speaks the sound of his voice is heard away up there in the sky. The watchers below see the formation alter. They hear an intensified roar of engines as the squadron leader shoots ahead of his eight ‘planes, they see the eight fighters wheel, they see the leader turn with a half roll ; and the squadron, in the same formation as before, is flying in the reverse direction.

‘Wonderful !’ say the hundred thousand. It is ! It is uncanny. In the middle of a great crowd a

loud-speaker magnifies the King's voice. It magnifies also the roar of the flying machines so that you hear the order much as the squadron leader high in the air hears it, coming up from the green earth through the thunder of the engines—the voice of the King.

I stand there, among the thousands of people who make Hendon Aerodrome look like a racecourse, and I feel that we are unconsciously witnessing an historic sight. I remember those Kings of England who have stood on hills and sent orders to their bowmen and their horsemen, I think how thrilled we should be could we put back the clock and hear Edward III order the advance of Crécy, how romantic it would be to have heard Henry V harangue his troops before he flung them into the Battle of Agincourt . . . and at the Air Force Pageant we hear the King of England speak to nine black hawks in the sky; and the hawks wheel to his bidding.

Girls stand on chairs, men (who were in the Air Force during the War) explain to them those technicalities which women pretend to hear, soldiers, sailors, members of Parliament, and the air attachés of foreign Powers gaze upward through the afternoon at the surprising pageant of British air power unfolded against a petulant English sky.

I watch four squadrons drill as perfectly as the Guards drill on parade, keeping a straight line, wing tip to wing tip, booming through the heavens like a flight of wild duck, slowly altering the pattern of their progress, wheeling, changing formation, exact, and sinister with death-dealing power. As they come out of the distance, black dots that grow in size each second, black dots that hum like a nest

of hornets, that throb nearer till the throb becomes a roar, I remember the Gothas.

'I heard an Army lecture the other day,' says a young soldier who is standing next to me, 'and the lecturer proved that another war is impossible for another fifty years because the economic stability of nations is wrecked.'

'Yes?'

'I think he was talking through his hat somewhat, don't you? I think the next war will be over in a day and will cost, roughly, fourpence.'

He inserts a monocle in his eye and directs a pink face to the heavens, and I think, 'Out of the mouths of babes . . .'

'Isn't it all perfectly thrilling?' says his girl.

Then a heavy bomber takes the air, a great cumbersome black thing which can carry five men with it to sow death. It zooms round in a circle till it meets two trim little swift fighting 'planes that set about it like two sparrows chivying a thrush. The three-cornered battle for position goes on. One of the fighting 'planes faces the enemy and there comes a rattle of machine guns like a stick drawn over railings.

The bomber does an astonishing thing. It dips and loops. This great battleship of the air behaves like a flippant monoplane. It seems trying to shake off its pursuers with stunts which no old-time bomber would dare to have attempted.

'They used to talk about the silent Navy,' says my blond friend, 'but I think the R.A.F.'s been doing a bit of quiet work since the War. Did you ever see such flying?'

I go away with two visions : one of the air full of machines and cities huddling in terror, one of the

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King of England speaking to his flying squadron quietly, as a man might speak to a friend over a telephone. . . .

§ 11

A MAN is washing down the steps of the little restaurant under the trees of Kensington Gardens, which is the most delicious spot for breakfast on a warm June morning. The cat which has been locked up all night is prowling over the grass like a pirate king. Birds are singing in the trees, the early sun is casting wrong-way-round shadows on the grass, to the left there is a glassy greyness, the Serpentine, while to the right an occasional horseman jingles to the Row.

You are the only person down for breakfast in Kensington Gardens and, having arrived before the waiters, you feel a kind of virtuous indignation. There are dreadfully dissipated-looking crumbs on the green metal table left over from some one's outdoor dinner of the night before. They look ghastly in the pure morning light, suggesting mutton, or roast beef and sticky potatoes. You hold off the cat while you throw them to a sparrow. Then you hear a motor-car approaching, and soon there comes across the grass a man and a girl.

'Can we have breakfast?' he asks the step-washer.

'At about nine,' is the reply.

'You don't mind waiting, dearest?'

'No, not a bit!'

Quickly she catches his hand and gives it a squeeze, and they come and sit down on small green chairs near you in the wide-flung shade of an enormous beech tree.

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Then you remember with a kind of shock that when you are in love you get up at seven, or even six, o'clock in the morning to snatch an hour together before the day begins. No doubt it is still happening all over London. Delicious joy rides to nowhere, glorious morning walks anywhere and always at the meeting, 'Do you love me?', as if a sudden emotional landslip might have occurred since the last assurance at eleven o'clock the previous night. Surely a test of love is the genuine belief that the other person is suffering from spiritual astigmatism. What she can see in you is, to you, inconceivable. That she does see things must be audibly obvious to you every ten minutes, much as a person in danger of falling asleep in church pinches himself to keep conscious.

'Do you love me?'

'You know I do.'

'Yes, but *say* it.'

(Whisper, whisper, whisper.)

There they sit in the shade of an enormous beech tree—making the world go round.

'Ham?' says the waiter to them.

'Yes, ham', they reply, 'and eggs.'

'And coffee,' says the girl, stifling a small yawn.
'Strong.'

'Coffee hasn't come yet,' says the waiter.

'Then tea.'

The man walks off to his two-seater to bring her a cushion, and she takes the chance to bring out a small mirror and find out how awful she looks. She is deeply in love. She is about twenty-eight, and consequently realizes that early morning is not her best time of day. He comes back with the cushion and a little book. He begins to read to her, solemnly and intently, and she, paying no attention to the

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wonderful words he is using, cups her chin in her hands and watches his face, noting the incredibly beautiful way his mouth moves and—probably even admiring his moustache.

‘Isn’t that wonderful?’ he says, putting down the book.

‘Yes, do take your hat off.’

He begins to read again and she bends over and takes off his hat, putting it gently under the table. You catch a word here and there. He is reading Stevenson’s ‘Romance’.

‘I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
Of bird song at morning and star shine at night.
I will make a palace fit for you and me
Of green days in forests and blue days at sea. . . .’

‘Ham?’ remarks the waiter.

‘Isn’t it wonderful?’ says the man.

The waiter thinks for a moment that the pink and white portions of ham are being praised and appears gratified, but, being used to lovers, he quickly smothers his smile and goes away. Then those two abandon themselves to the joy of eating together. He likes watching her fingers drop sugar in his tea, passing salt to him, and you sit there thinking what a shame that life should ever be any different for them. If we could always be as crazily happy the world would not go round: it would explode.

They crack their eggs and catch themselves looking up at one another with a kind of religious enthusiasm. Then they smile, such a smile. . . . You wonder if he will ever shout out at breakfast, ‘Good heavens, I’m late again, why on earth can’t you . . .’ and aim a hasty kiss at her, miss and collide with her right ear and dash out into the world, like a human volcano. . . .

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His hand lies on the table ; she places hers over it, and they look out across the shadow-barred grass powdered with white daisies, through the trees where the smooth waters of the Serpentine lie like a silver lake. So they sit in a spell till he looks at his watch. The world is calling him ! This must end ! They rise up and walk very close together over the dappled morning grass.

As you go through the Park the children are coming out with their nursemaids, and you think that no matter how many people in London began the day badly, two at least had started well under the wide-flung shade of an enormous beech tree which has probably grown old to whispers. . . .

‘ Do you love me ? ’

‘ You *know* I do.’

‘ Well, *say* it ! ’

The beech tree must have heard a deal of saying.

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§ I

THERE is, strictly speaking, no need to write much about Henley. It can be put in one phrase : ' Her eyes are blue.' . . .

She wears the cream coat with the white fur collar which she bought on the Croisette last February and, as I say, her eyes are blue, not a musical comedy heroine blue : a Spartan blue with a touch of steel in it. As we sit in canvas chairs, shaved lawns to the back and an old wall and the Thames to the front, I have occasion to know that her shoes are a triumphant climax to a fine sweep of the only right shade of sand silk : slim sandals with a thin strip of white leather running from toe to instep. Her eyes are blue. Repeat the last sentence five hundred times and you have the heart of Henley : blue eyes and cold chicken, sand stockings and strawberries. . . .

Round us on green lawns are Old Blues. Some are so old that they have turned white. They wear caps of eggshell blue and navy blue and cherry pink, and they look as Rip Van Winkle might have looked when he awakened if his sleep had come on him during his schooldays. They seem vaguely excited and they often gaze upstream. They are rather a nuisance ; they convey the strange impression that this is a regatta.

Every year when Henley comes round in its due time it seems that some frolicking giant empties into the Thames a box of confetti which, clinging together lodges in a straight line in the very centre of the olive-green river. You look at this floating

confetti and see that it is composed of hundreds of punts wedged together like a crowd in the Mall. In the punts are men in savage blazers which proclaim in hoarse, scarlet accents the hall-mark of their wearers in polite society. There are also girls. In the air balloons filled with gas bob and rise in bunches on the end of long strings.

‘Like their dear little souls bobbing about,’ says the girl with the blue eyes.

I try to cheer her up ; but she is too young to be simple-minded. I point out the striped pavilions on the other bank. More Old Blues ! Some of the oldest in the world. Faint across the water comes the sound of a band. Hospital students with a piano in a punt are singing in a good cause and collecting money in a net at the end of a long bamboo pole. The sun comes out of a hot, steamy sky and lights up the confetti so that it shines.

‘Like Nice dumped in the Thames,’ says the girl with the blue eyes as she prods moss with the point of her parasol.

Everybody says how English Henley is. It is, of course, quite un-English. It is like a sheikh in the Strand. Even the poplars rise up out of the green beaches by the river as if mildly outraged by this colourful intrusion. The quiet green countryside ending in a vista of sage-green trees beside a silver stream is hushed in astonishment. Englishmen who generally go about the world in black come out in scarlet stripes, in blue and yellow, in green and mauve.

Somebody’s father leans out of a punt and coyly bursts a balloon.

How shamefully Latin !

How lazy, how peaceful. . . .

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Blue eyes and a faint hint of scent in the air and a slow, indolent voice : ' Cynthia says she is going to marry Frank no matter what Mother says.'

' Really ? '

' Of course they'll be happy. Not a bean in all the world. That means they'll have to work, and work means happiness.'

' Fancy that ! Really ! What is work ? . . . '

The line of confetti lounges somnolently. On the fringes a girl with pink arms paddles a punt into position. Three balloons break loose and sail up in the air. A nigger minstrel in a silk hat twangs a banjo, and from his round mouth comes information about his home town and water-melons. Someone gives him sixpence. A thousand women open wickerwork baskets and say they've forgotten the salt and that the butter's mixed up with the mustard.

Hello !

The line of confetti moves. It wriggles and rises. A gun booms. The Old Blues bring out field-glasses. . . . ' And when Uncle Jim died they found out that for years—practically years—he'd been married, well practically married, to his cook and . . . '

Far down the silvery stream there is cheering. Girls in the line of confetti are waving tiny coloured handkerchiefs. Two sweating eights come into sight, their oars sweeping back and forth in unison, the cox, red in the face, yelling at them, the hindmost eight bursting their muscles to win a yard. . . .

' Well rowed ! '

' Well rowed ! '

' *Jolly* well rowed ! '

' Yes, what were you saying ? Uncle Jim ? Confound these interruptions ! Would you like

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some salmon? And strawberries? And cream?
Then come. . . .'

Blue eyes ; and a faint hint of scent in the air.
That, more or less, is Henley.

§ 2

IF Uncle Athelstan leaves you money it must be good to be a country parson. Slaying greenfly on the Maréchal Niels should blend so well with the uprootment of sin from simple lives ; and how sweet it must be fussily to cross the sloping lawn on a July evening to write your sermon with a brown gardener's hand in the summer arbour under the old yew tree. . . .

Sweetest of all must be July and Lord's. The 'Varsity match pulls the parson back into life. In thousands of vicarages come some memory of old times. The picture of fifteen young men and a Rugger ball over the study mantelpiece (next to the big photograph of the Coliseum) must become a target for many a wistful glance. Somewhere in that group is the vicar, hefty and keen, as he was before life smoothed him and rounded him and gave him that well-bred resignation and that air of hope in a world to come.

Yes ; he played a straight bat in those days, he stroked an eight at Henley, he did everything well, and he was looked on as a good sportsman. . . . Lord's ! He'll meet the men of his year at Lord's. Old Brown, who is a bishop ; old Sir Arthur Crutch the soldier, Jimmie Mont the scientist ; and Oswald Blake, who is still delightfully nothing. Then the vicar packs his bag, casts a doubtful glance at his silk hat (' No, of course, you mustn't buy a new one,

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dear ; such extravagance !'), and the dog-cart takes him to the station . . . to London . . . to the old memories and the men he played with once.

So when you sit among the crowd at Lord's during the 'Varsity Match you will, no matter how good the cricket is, find your eyes straying towards the vicars and the deans and the bishops. It is their day of days. How good it is to sit at Lord's in bursts of sun, with your hat brim down, your eyes in a line of shadow, your chin warm with sun, the sun on your hands, and Cambridge fielding and Oxford making runs, playing the only game that could still be played in a high hat. All round you friends are meeting.

When Oxford went out at one o'clock seven men harnessed themselves to a giant roller and walked up and down the pitch, crushing the sweet-smelling turf. The crowd surged out from free seats and cheap seats and not-so-cheap seats till the green ground looked like the garden party at a Church conference. Difficult to believe that all these grave men of God were undergraduates thirty years ago !

Some have stolen away alone to flavour the past by themselves, to hear the sharp, delicious crack of leather on willow ; others have brought daughters with 'vicarage' written all over their sweet faces. And some come in gaiters and some come in rusty old brown-black suits and hats that seem to shout sadly that the organ fund still stands at £4 2s. 3d., and that the vestry still leaks like—anything !

'You remember me ?'

A little country parson is speaking, a healthy little rose-grower, if ever there was one : dog hairs on his broadcloth ! The bishop looks down from his

stringed silk hat, down over his undulating apron to the little beaming man, and he adjusts his pince-nez.

'Brown? Brown? Of course.'

The bishop comes off his throne. His white hand grasps the brown country hand, and the country parson sparkles with pleasure to find himself remembered. He tells the bishop how he enjoyed his book on the Early Christian martyrs (but he does not mention that he had to borrow it), and the bishop remembers the debates in those old days, the arguments 'about it and about', the ideals and the things they meant to do in life, the violent splitting of hairs . . . and surely this was the man who once emptied a water-jug over him! Ahem!

'Dine with me to-night,' says the bishop.

'I would like to do so,' stutters the parson, 'but I have already—er—promised . . .'

'Well, some other time.'

And the little parson goes off knowing that he has promised nothing, that he will dine alone in a temperance hotel . . . with dog hairs on the elbow of his brown-black coat, for that is the only coat he has!

§ 3

WHEN you go to Lord's to see Eton beat Harrow, or Harrow beat Eton, you are certain to find yourself sitting next to a large man in the late forties, a handsome, yellow-haired Norseman. He sits with his silk hat pushed back from his forehead and his cornflower-blue eyes fixed on the field. Now and then his huge, pink, freckled hands holding the match card twitch excitedly and, never taking his

eyes from Eton and Harrow, he shouts at the top of his voice :

‘Oh, a beauty . . . a good shot ! Played, sir ! That’s the style ! Oh, a good shot !’

Beside him sits his son, a smaller version of himself, hiding that broad forehead under a big topper, the same jaw line, the same fair skin, but sombre dark eyes. You can tell that the absent wife is dark and southern—just the kind a tawny man marries, given a fair run—and the lad is quiet and reserved, so that when the people in front turn to see who is making such a dreadful noise he looks away slightly pained. The front-benchers, turning, meet the cornflower eyes and the slightly-parted lips of the father, and they have to smile with happiness.

‘My dear,’ says a woman, ‘do look behind—not now, in a minute—isn’t he a darling ? Did you ever see such enthusiasm or such deep blue eyes ?’

Just then Harrow hits a boundary. Twenty or thirty people turn to listen :

‘Pretty, pretty—oh, a pretty stroke. . . .’

The son sits sunk in gloom, gazing up swiftly at his father’s youthful blue eyes with dark, middle-aged regret. . . .

‘Forty years on growing younger and younger . . .’ you sing under your breath.

Round you curve the stands, packed with the best-looking crowd of the London year. You can rave about Ascot, but let me rave about Lord’s at the Eton and Harrow match : the tiers of ninon and *crêpe de Chine*, the marvellous revelation of other fellows’ sisters (that marvel of life : how does spotty-faced Brown Major manage to have a sister like Helen of Troy ?), the coaches with pairs of admirable beige and peach legs dangling over the top deck,

now and then a human tadpole who hasn't grown tails blushfully arming his sisters round, a mother watching her boy step briskly down the pavilion steps with his bat beneath his arm—a wonderful day, a fit climax to the London season.

'No, my lad, don't you take 'em !' shouts Cornflower Eyes to the distant batsman. 'You let 'em go past you, old feller. . . . Did you see that leg break, Johnny?'

'Yes, dad,' says the son coldly.

A few minutes before the luncheon bell the score touches a hundred, and the man who has turned the Harrow song inside out takes off his gleaming hat and waves it in the air. He grows younger and younger ! He now seems like anybody's fag ! I look at that firm, pink face and see him exactly as he was at fourteen !

Luncheon ! The line of colour round Lord's breaks and moves forward as thousands swarm over the field.

You meet a man and his wife from Chicago. They have never seen a cricket match. They have just arrived. They gaze at the silk hats on the green and :

'My !' they say, 'where's this cricket game ? And what are those youngsters dressed up in high hats for ?'

You explain it all to them.

'The ninety-sixth annual match ?' they cry. 'You don't say !'

You try to tell them that it is much more than a cricket match, that it is annual proof of a tradition, that England's battles . . . that . . . that . . . how difficult it is to explain these things !

'We thought we'd maybe hear some shouting here

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this afternoon,' says the husband doubtfully. Shouting? He is thinking of baseball.

Your eye catches the plump figure of a bishop walking with one of the best-looking members of the Cabinet!

'Don't reckon on that!' you put in quickly. 'We take things very quietly. This is only a kind of proof that sons are almost as good as their fathers, that sisters are still as pretty, that mothers are still as lovely, and that Eton can still shout at Harrow.'

Among the gently moving, variegated crowd you catch sight of your friend with the cornflower eyes. The father is meeting old Harrovians; pinker and pinker he grows; you can hear his laugh puncturing the babel. The son stands by with well-bred composure, thinking that the gov'nor is letting himself go a bit too much, just a little bit too happy is the old man. . . .

Ah, you think to yourself, some day that boy will stand on that field, with youth lying like a dream behind him, and then he will remember how his father's eyes lit up, and then perhaps he will understand. . . .

§ 4

A CROWD lingers round the Victoria Memorial in the Mall to watch you go through the gates of Buckingham Palace to the King's Garden Party. A royal garden party is exactly like any other garden party except that the crowd is, perhaps, more self-conscious.

Your car runs through the central archway of the Palace and falls into line in a queue. Car after car discharges its occupants under a glass portico.

An official in scarlet and gold takes your invitation card, and you join a crowd of people all walking one way down the long corridors, through a large, heavily-pictured and deep-carpeted room that leads out to a wide terrace. The back of Buckingham Palace is surprisingly beautiful. Lovely lawns, streaked with the light green lines of recent mowing, slope to a lake fringed with reeds. In the centre of the lawn is a scarlet canopy upheld by bamboo poles covered with chased silver-work. This is the famous Durbar Pavilion. It leads to the royal marquee, in which fruit is seen lying like Academy still-life groups on gold plates and in gold cups. To the right is a larger marquee, in which, later on, you will fight to feed a woman.

You are conscious, as you walk over the lawns, of the roar of an invisible London. You can hear the omnibuses rushing by towards Victoria, but the gardens look, as indeed they are, a part of the parks, and if the top stories of certain tall buildings near Victoria did not stand up above the trees you would think yourself in the grounds of a large country house miles away in a green shire.

It is impossible to go to a Palace garden party without meeting some one you know. It is a pretty wide net cast out in London. The lawns are occupied by thousands of men in silk hats or grey Ascot hats, and thousands of women and girls in rainbow beauty. They keep on walking, so that the colour pattern against the green grass is always changing. Now and then the conventional crowd seems to stand aside to permit one of the King's more unusual guests to reveal himself; a native ruler in yellow silk jacket, a Malayan noble in apple-green trousers and a hat like a strawberry basket on his oiled head,

or merely a Labour member of Parliament living up to his principles in a Stetson.

You come face to face with a famous statesman, a poet, a soldier, a much-photographed beauty, an actress with a cachet from the last generation, a Dominions High Commissioner. Members of both Houses of Parliament are as frequent as blackberries in September. . . .

Ah, something is happening! A clock strikes four! A Household Cavalry band plays the National Anthem. Thousands of silk and grey toppers are raised. The King and the Queen walk out to meet their guests. Behind them are members of the Royal Family. There is polite rubber-necking. People edge up and pretend not to be vulgarly curious :

‘My!’ says an American *débutante*, ‘isn’t the Queen good-looking?’

The Queen is one of the most regal women in the world, and she never looks more gracious than in her own garden greeting the hundreds of people whom it is the duty of royalty to greet with the right word of welcome. Little groups form round the King and other groups form round the Queen. In the centre of these the King and Queen hold an informal Court. If you hang on the edge you realize how trying kingship must be. You think how you would hate to have to shake hands with hundreds of people and provide the right words for each and—look as if you loved it.

You hear the King’s laugh. You see a blushing girl sink in a curtsy. The King’s voice goes on round the group, and you are surprised that he should remember so many of the people. ‘Is your son better?’ you hear him ask some one.

A L O N D O N Y E A R

The royal party retires to its marquee.

'I'd adore an ice,' says some one's sister.

You plunge into the refreshment tent. You butt into the backs of morning coats. You politely insinuate yourself towards a strawberry ice, which a gallant admiral carries off just as your fingers are outstretched. You find another and bear it away.

'You know lots about London ; tell me about Buckingham Palace. . . .'

'Well, it's modern, of course. In Charles II's time it was known as Mulberry Garden because James I in his attempt to encourage the English silk industry had it planted with mulberries. The Earl of Arlington had a house on this site in 1674 and he imported the first pound of tea to enter this country. It cost him sixty shillings, so probably the first cup of tea was made here.'

'How thrilling ! But when did it become a royal palace ?'

'The Duke of Buckingham bought Arlington House and built Buckingham House, and George III bought Buckingham House. George IV had the building remodelled, but neither he nor his successor occupied it. It is only since the accession of Queen Victoria that it has become the regular London residence of the sovereign. . . .'

After tea you fight down a craving for tobacco ; for you must not smoke in the gardens of Buckingham Palace ! You decide to go away and smoke outside. You walk through a shrubbery. You surprise a lonely man sitting under a tree, his silk hat beside him on the seat. He looks up like a guilty schoolboy. A thin wreath of tobacco rises from behind him ! He realizes that you know his awful secret, and there

J U L Y

an appealing look in his eyes—are you a good sportsman or the Lord Chamberlain?

You smile. His better nature asserts itself. He rocks out a pipe—a pipe!—and rising, a better and a nobler man, goes back with an innocent face to the party as if he had not sinned at all!

AUGUST

§ 1

THE time has now come when some reckless pen repeats the annual falsehood : ' London is empty ' (which only means that the Dowager Lady Slimmer has gone to Perthshire).

London empty !

It was empty once only in history, after the Eagles had been called home to Rome to assist in the obsequies of an empire, and then, it is true, night fell upon London as it fell upon the world, so that when the Saxons came, cupping their hands on Ludgate Hill, and shouting to the weed-grown ruin of the Roman wall, ' Hallo, there ! Any one at home ? ' an echo only answered them ; and they went in, and London was born again. . . .

London empty !

Goodwood is over, and the sleeping-cars from King's Cross, Euston and St. Pancras will soon be taking the men with the guns and the fishing-rods, and the girls with the shooting sticks and the golf clubs, away to the north, to awaken them in a land of stone walls where amber-coloured streams run beneath grey bridges. The hair of the railway porters in that land shines like fire in a bush, and the clouds are white caps on the heads of the hills. There is wind and heather.

Meanwhile London is full. Those lucky migrants are a mere spoonful from the ocean of London life. A larger spoonful trickles to the coast, and still there are millions who never leave London, and hundreds of thousands who will pour in during August from the rest of the world. There are just now

countless young American women in brown tweed costumes, their heads buried in guide-books. They are not dollar princesses. This is most likely their first trip to Europe. They are keen and interesting, and very thrilled by London. You may meet them in the square before the grey Guildhall with the pigeons nodding round their low-heeled shoes.

'My!' they say. 'Fancy living and working with all this around!' and they look up to our grey spires and towers with eyes in which there is reverence.

The Londoner cannot understand them. He cannot realize what it is to live without history, in a recent city where any middle-aged man can remember the square before they built the Court-house, can remember them laying out the main street and the coming of the railway. The tourist from a new country cannot, in his turn, understand the Londoner's casual view of his city, that 'it-always-has-been-here-and-always-will-be-here' air, that familiarity which breeds carelessness. To their fresh eyes London is like a history book come to life. So every day is a sight-seeing day in August and the St. Paul's climbing season is in full swing.

Every morning at breakfast visitors to London open their guide-books and read that only 616 steps lead to the ball which supports the great cross above the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Only 616! Pooh, that's nothing—pass the marmalade!

I step out on the Stone Gallery, feeling rather blown, to discover about twenty people taking silent stock of London. Half of them are Americans. There are several of those lissom college girls with

faces like magazine covers who add so greatly to the beauty of Autumn, there are business-like fathers absorbing the scene through horn-rimmed glasses, and mothers, also in horn-rims, who, like so many American women of this type, seem carelessly to have crashed into their middle age. There are two Indian students gazing down into Cheapside, there is a Scotsman looking over the hideous roof of Cannon Street Station towards London Bridge, and there is a friendly, talkative Yorkshireman with a camera, who is making a roof record of the world's great cities ; he already possesses the roof lines of New York, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Vienna, Liverpool, and Manchester.

'This', says the guide, picking off gritty masses of congealed soot and filth from a piece of Portland stone, 'is what makes London so healthy.'

He is perfectly serious, and—as we are all strangers—we do not dare to contradict him !

I think that I would like to climb into the ball below the cross. I leave the international gathering and plunge into the lonely gloom of a twisting staircase that runs inside the dome. Up, up I go, marvelling at Wren's achievement. I step out on the Golden Gallery ; and—this is the place from which to look at London !

It is a sunny, warm afternoon with just enough wind to blow away the smoke and reveal the boundaries. I see Harrow Church among green hills, the Crystal Palace on its high ridge. I see the Thames winding up to Kew and, growing broader, flowing out to hills and the sea. Millions of homes with the silver strip of river between, spires of parish churches which stood beside village greens before London crept up and engulfed them : a great stone

octopus growing, ever growing, pushing out a tentacle here and another there.

Down below the tiny people swarm, the tiny omnibuses, small enough to pass through a needle's eye, thread the narrow ways, and there is just the faintest feeling of life, of the power of those thousand wheels, in the iron balustrading.

I climb up higher still towards the cross of St. Paul's.

Now the staircases become openwork and difficult. There are three, the last one ending in a narrow place just big enough to take the body. There is a little window covered by wire-netting. I cling to the staircase and look out—a perfectly terrifying view of London, as if one were looking out of a stationary airship. When I look up it seems that the great cross of Paul's is leaning against the sky.

Then I remember the strange story, quoted by Thornbury from *The Cyclopaedia of Medicine*, of the man who met a wizard in this very spot. This young man, who obviously went mad, said that he was taken up into the ball of St. Paul's by a stranger whom he had met in the churchyard. When they were there a strange fear and trembling assailed him as his friend took out a queer instrument like a compass with a mirror in the centre, which he addressed in a strange language. He then asked the young man if there was any one in London whom he would like to see. He asked to see his father. Immediately a picture of his father appeared in the mirror. The young man was so frightened that he said he must descend. At the door of St. Paul's the mysterious stranger whispered in his ear, 'Don't forget that you are the Slave of the Man with the Mirror!'

This experience preyed so continuously on the young man's mind that he declared to a doctor who saw him that the wizard of St. Paul's was always calling him and that his life had become a thing of horror. What a spot for a magician! What a scene for a drama with a great city lying below like a map: the ideal vantage ground from which an Asmodeus might pry into the secrets of eight million lives!

I climb down into the Golden Gallery and down to the Stone Gallery. Here the visitors have altered. A new group lean over the stonework, trying to take in the enormous network of London. Their guide is trying to trace the Roman wall for them, to show them where London began, but the visitors just stand gazing out with blank expressions over the endless roofs. It is too big to explain away in a ten-minute talk!

I wonder what they are really thinking. Is that man thinking, 'A fool is born every minute down there,' or is he thinking 'Millions of homes and millions of people searching for happiness, suffering . . . loving, hating, and everywhere something good in the very worst of them . . .'? Is he? No. He takes out his watch, looks alarmed, and says to his wife in an injured voice:

'What about tea?'

They leave London to others and climb downstairs.

§ 2

EVERY morning soon after 9 a.m. a big green char-à-banc draws up near the office of the American Express Company in the Haymarket.

The men passengers stand around buying the

Paris editions of New York and Chicago papers ; the women talk. Mothers form groups and tell each other which theatre they visited the previous evening ; the daughters form groups and talk about being back home for college in the 'fall'. Such a buzz of conversation :

'We're just crazy to see the Tower of London, for we sail to-morrow. . . .'

'My, isn't it cold ? Everything warm I have is on me. . . .'

'We wanted to make Boston early this fall, but we've gotta see Parus yet. . . .'

'And no central heating ! So we came back right away. . . .'

'And the draughts ! Don't these English people love draughts that shake out your back teeth ? That's why we left Warwick-shire !'

Nearby, on the edge of the pavement, stands an elderly entertainer who rises early to give the United States a series of statuesque poses with the aid of a felt hat from which the crown has been cut ; now he is Napoleon, now he is Nelson, now Scrooge, now a monk, now a coy young woman. . . .

'See here, Billy, hand him some of this junk. I guess these pennies'll sink the boat if I cain't wish them on some one. . . .'

'Now, ladies and gentlemen, kindly take your seats !'

There is a commotion ; the knowledge is borne home that Mistinguette has many rivals, and soon the char-à-banc, with stern faces, sallow faces, pretty faces, moves off into London.

'This on your left is Trafalgar Square. The column was erected to a great English sailor—Admiral Lord Nelson !'

A L O N D O N Y E A R

It all sounds exceeding strange to me.

'On your right is Cleopatra's Needle . . .'
('Gee ! I guess we've got the twin in Central Park')
' . . . and on your left is a building known as Somerset House.'

I shrink back in my seat. I can pretend that I had never seen Nelson before, but to be shown the G.H.Q. of the income tax gives me a queer little ache.

'Here is the Inland Revenue Department. . . .'

The whole coachload gaze up at this regrettable pile with faces which prove that they had never been hurt by it. How glorious, I think, to be able to look at Somerset House dispassionately.

At Cannon Street we are held up by traffic.

'And *now* you are in the City of London,' says the guide.

'Then where have we been for the last fortnight ?' asks a pretty young Middle Westerner.

'Westminster,' replies her husband, who has a map.

I gather that she is not quite clear about this. I want to explain to her : I long to tell her that London was planned by the Romans and that everything outside the now vanished wall is not the City of London, is just adipose tissue ; but I dare not—I am a tourist.

The Tower ! We stand in a bunch watching the sentry in his scarlet tunic and—Gee !—how our eyes light up at the sight of our first Yeoman Warder in his Tudor bonnet ! In the Byward Tower we look at the Heath Robinsonian wheels and ropes which in ancient days lowered the wooden portcullis. This portcullis is still there, a piece of mighty fretwork. If they let it down in your face it was

no good to hammer at it ; you had to consult a gunpowder expert.

‘ Can this portcullis still be used ? ’ asks a practical visitor from Chicago.

‘ Oh, yes,’ replies the warder, ‘ it was lowered recently by the Office of Works’ officials and it went down smoothly and sweetly.’

We all smile ! We like to imagine that great brute of a gate, made to defy the King’s enemies, descending like a maiden’s sigh. Smoothly and sweetly ! (Gosh ! we must remember to put that in our diaries ! That’s a new one on us !)

Up and round, and round and up we go into the Salt and Broad Arrow Towers. Cold, heartless rooms ! What must it have felt like to hear the great doors slam and to know that for years these rooms would be your world till the Man in the Black Mask, leaning on his axe, was ready to give you release ?

Plate-glass covers the words cut by prisoners in the stones. So beautifully done, of course, for they had time to put into them the love and effort they might have put into life. Hew Draper, Sir Everard Digby are two names that send you to the Encyclopaedia, Michael Moody, Henry Walpole . . . initials, little patterns, and, so human and pathetic, hearts with words inside them like those which lovers cut in trees. . . .

But the Martin Tower thrills and grips. Here is the scene of three wonderful stories—one of theft, one of imprisonment, and one supernatural. Till 1841 the Crown Jewels were housed here. Here in the reign of Charles II took place that astonishing plot to steal them. A daring rogue called Colonel Blood, disguising himself as a parson, made friends

with the aged deputy-keeper and his wife. He suggested that his nephew should marry their daughter. One day, with four companions, one of whom pretended to be the bridegroom, Blood entered the Jewel House, gagged the old man, and might have got clear with the jewels if the keeper's son, just home from Flanders, had not rushed in. There was a wild stampede, in which Blood and a man called Parrot departed with the Globe and the Crown of England ! But they were captured. The Crown fell in the dirt, a pearl was picked up by a sweeper, a diamond by an apprentice, and several stones were lost.

The strangest part of the story is that no one was punished ! In fact, Blood eventually was received at Court, and given a pension of £500 a year ! (' And, say, they had no movies in those days, I guess. . . .')

We go upstairs. Here took place the most dramatic haunting in the history of the Tower. One Saturday night in October, 1817, Mr. E. L. Swifte, the Keeper of the Jewels, was sitting at supper with his wife in this small room when, to their horror, a pale mist formed over the table : a white thing that seemed palpitating with a queer bluish life. It moved slowly to Mrs. Swifte, who cried, ' Oh, God, it has seized me ! ' Her husband hit it with a chair, and it slowly moved round the room and vanished.

It was outside this tower, soon after, that a sentry saw a shapeless mass issuing from under the Jewel Room door. He lunged at it with his bayonet, which passed straight through it and stuck in the wood. He was picked up unconscious and would have been sentenced by court martial, but evidence

was given that someone in the officers' mess near by had heard him challenge, had seen him lunge and fall to the ground.

In this Martin Tower we are reminded of Harry Percy, ninth Earl of Northumberland, soldier, scholar, lover of children, books and flowers, who, could he only have shut his hot mouth, might have been one of the greatest men of his time. He spent sixteen years reading, studying, loud-voiced and hot-headed. (The Tower was a kind of inevitable hotel for the fighting Percys!) Here he knew Raleigh. They talked and studied together, dreamed together of discovering the Elixir of Life. The Tower must have had its points in those days! Harry Percy studied so deeply that he was called the 'Wizard Earl'.

When his daughter married a Court favourite and obtained her father's pardon, old Harry Percy was so angry at the thought of accepting any favour from an upstart son-in-law that he refused to leave the Tower! The Lieutenant told him that if he would go a salute of cannon would be fired in his honour. He merely turned to his books, and probably swore. At length he fell ill, and his children tactfully extracted him from his self-made prison. But how hard the devil died in him! No sooner had he reached home than he learned that the Duke of Buckingham was driving about London in a coach and six. He set up a howl of rage! How dare a Villiers outdo a Percy in pomp? He ordered eight horses to take him round town!

We drift on slowly and, what do you think, a fife band is playing, near the Bloody Tower, 'Marching Through Georgia!' We all smile! We watch a guard being mounted, and we can hardly be

dragged away to see the Crown Jewels ; but when we do see them I think we agree unanimously that they make Tiffany look like something out of a Christmas cracker. . . .

‘ And does he wear that crown ? You don’t say ! That’s ermine round the edge to keep his poor head from cracking. “ Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown,” you bet ! Now I get the meaning of that ! ’

We see the axe. We admire the armour ; and we are just like children hearing a story for the first time. We are ‘ thrilled almost to death ’. I know this, because, as we are leaving, a big man who had not shown any particular interest whispers to his wife, ‘ England’s a whale of a place, isn’t it ? ’

We leave the Tower ; we pile into our charabanc ; we go slowly through the crowded, sunny streets ; we admire the Guildhall and its pigeons ; we dive into the crypt of St. Paul’s ; and we run smoothly down Ludgate Hill and up Fleet Street.

‘ Strange Americans, always looking at things ! ’

Curious London faces gaze up at us from the crowds, and wonder what we see in ‘ things ’.

§ 3

COOL, green water. . . .

It is so cool that just to look at it is like a damp sheet wrapped round you. It is so peaceful, so still, so green with depth. There is constant music of it trickling and gurgling and plopping and making all the sounds that cool green water makes. You look at it, not down into it, but at it, as if you were walking about on the bottom of the sea in a diver’s dress. When you look up it is a long way to the

surface where the light plays and flickers, sending down beams which are immediately put on ice by so much cool, green water. . . .

A blue fish with a scarlet waistcoat sails out from some remote grey cave wearing gold-rimmed eyes. It looks at you stolidly for a bit, it opens its mouth as if it were going to say, 'Good heavens, there's Alfred!' and then, after rudely blowing a portion of its breakfast at you, turns with a sharp twist of its green tail and shoots through the shadowy greenness and is lost to sight. Little quicksilver air bubbles ascend in a straight line through the water and burst on the surface above. Green and brown trailing plants sway this way and that as the waters stir. How deliciously cool, how comforting, a place where heat has never been known! Look! Another fish with gold-rimmed eyes swims up, frolics, lets the water swill and cascade over its glittering body! There is no sound but the trickle and gurgle and plop of cool, green water. No light but that which filters through cool, green water . . . cool, green light.

This is the Zoo aquarium, the only place in London where you can forget eighty degrees in the shade!

If I were a fish I would not like to be a trout. It would be as bad as belonging to a very large family. You bunch together all day, facing one way with your noses in a bubble stream, just moving your fins a bit to keep steady, waiting for something to come your way. Then when it comes you all dash at it as one. A poor, overcrowded life.

I would not like to be one of those dopey fishes covered with warts which sit in caves like Diogenes in his barrel, just moping and letting the water plants tickle their whiskers. Some have even been fitted

with ball-bearing eyes to save them the trouble of turning round. No zest in this sort of existence, no enterprise. And eels are no better. It must be exceedingly unpleasant to be such an untidy size, all over the place at once, one-half of you not knowing how the other half lives and every kind of haddock running into a section of you without apologizing. Then there are queer, eccentric fish so curiously designed, so complex, so replete with spare parts, so fitted by evolution for any emergency that life must be one confounded puzzle to remember whether the rope growing from your chest was put there in case of fire or tempest.

Ah ! the happy fish is the lemon sole !

With lemons ruled out as one of life's little ironies, a sole is about the happiest thing in water and the loveliest to watch in a heat wave. If you were a sole you would have the most delightful accordion-pleated sides to you, your eyes would be together on top of your head in the handiest way, so that when you wanted to lie in the sand you could see what is going on above. You would do a lot of swimming. You would get the full value out of cool, green water.

You would agitate your accordion pleats and find yourself curving and dipping and somersaulting through the sparkling depths, doing cart-wheels over flounders and spotted plaice, looping the loop round air bubbles, and fluttering down through the sweet sea water, snapping your fins at the outrageous thought of Meunière, Colbert, or Bordelaise.

Then you would always have the lobsters to laugh at.

With one eye out of the sand you would meditate on the mysterious, remote world beneath the waves

to which you belong. A different order of life, a shadowy marvel of a world in which nature has played the most astonishing practical jokes with anatomy in order to perpetuate her species, and you might wonder who was the first fish that took the wrong turning and blundered out on land looking for trouble, fated to pile up all succeeding woe—the silly little fool!

But the lobster would bring you back to primal things. He is a prehistoric monster in mail. Did Nature design him as the conqueror of the universe and then get fed up with him and leave him, cutting her losses on so much specialization? The time she spent on fitting up lobsters, designing a new type of arm here, a new aerial there—marvellous! All he does in return is to stand for days together tic-tacking to another lobster with his antennæ. Something missing, some little quality absent, one of Nature's bad bargains! The fellow was made to conquer empires: he is a living fortress, the natural born soldier. What a failure! His boot-button eyes register no emotion. If any tender passion ever beats beneath his unboiled shirt for the little hen lobster with the bluey-green shoulders, no one ever knows; like Viola, he never tells his love, but lets concealment like a worm in the bud feed on his damask cheek—the very pattern of those strong, silent men so loathed by women.

But a sole! To be a flighty, accordion-pleated sole in cool, green waters, flirting gaily with a jet of ozonized air, feeling the cold swirl of the waves on your pearl-white underneath, lazily letting them blow out your pleats as a thin garment is blown by the wind . . . ah! . . .

'Beg pardon, sir, closing time!'

A L O N D O N Y E A R

‘ But I haven’t half done yet ! Oh ! well . . . ’
How beautiful is water, so peaceful, so still, so
green with depth !

§ 4

THE King is out of town. They are mounting the guard in St. James’s Palace. It is eleven o’clock.

The old guard and the new guard are drawn up facing one another at opposite ends of the Friary Court. The bright scarlet of their tunics, the sharp whiteness of their belts and rifle slings, the jet blackness of their bearskins form a splendid splash of colour backed by the tender tints of the old Palace, the weathered Tudor red brick and the grey stone of later date. In the far corner of the court the band stands in a circle playing ‘ The Mikado.’ The subaltern of the old guard and the subaltern of the new guard walk up and down chatting together, holding their drawn swords. The majors do this ; so do the two tall young men who carry the colours over their shoulders.

I look up at the Palace windows, thinking perhaps of Charles II and pretty ladies, and I note that high up on the roof, almost hidden by the grey battlements, a maidservant has come out to watch the show. She looks down on it as the princess in a fairy tale might watch from a turret !

What a crowd ! It closes the fourth side of the square. It contains provincial visitors gathering an unforgettable memory of London, foreign visitors gathering an unforgettable memory of England, Londoners who can never resist the temptation to linger, and loungers who look wistful, as if trying

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to make up their minds to 'go back to the Army again'.

The band plays on, softly, deliciously :

The flowers that bloom in the spring,

Tra la,

Have nothing to do with the case.

I've got to take under my wing,

Tra la,

A most unattractive old thing,

Tra la,

With a caricature of a face.

And that's what I mean when I say

or I sing,

Oh, bother the flowers that bloom in the spring . . .

Then it gallops to the 'tra la's' and old men beat their walking-sticks on the ground and girls sing under their breath. But the scarlet parade stands stock still. The wind blows into the black bearskins. A busy sergeant-major crosses the court with his chest out as if he were about to crow, rams his stick under his arm, hurls his head round towards the two majors, and flashes a white-gloved hand to the big black hearthrug on his head.

'Oh, listen what they're playing now!' says a girl.

They are playing a waltz! Such a waltz! Such a dreamy, sloppy, sentimental waltz! And I feel obscurely touched by the contrast of this waltz and two guards standing in full warpaint. I would much rather go over the top to a waltz tune than to the best war song ever written. I don't know why. . . .

Crash! The band ceases! Something is happening!

Fixed bayonets glitter an instant under an archway. Words of command ring out. The band,

with its scarlet chest covered in gold braid, forms up in marching order. Mounted police move the crowd back to the edge of the pavement, leaving the road clear. . . .

‘Eyes—right ! . . . Eyes—front !’

Somebody at the back with a ten-bull-power voice on rusty hinges is straightening things out. Salutes !

‘Rat-a-plan . . . rat-a-plan . . .’ says a kettle-drum quickly.

The officers take posts ! More commands. The guards present arms. The colours are lifted high above the fluffy black heads. Compliments of the new guard to the old guard. . . .

‘Sl—ow, march !’

The band moves off playing the slow march, the decorative drum-major, with his drumstick held across his medalled chest, slow stepping, toes pointed. The old guard follows. Heads are bared as the colour comes past : American, Italian, French and English heads. On they come. The wind plays with the colour, a deep crimson flag with dozens of names embroidered in gold. I see ‘Corunna’, ‘Tel-el-Kebir’, ‘Sebastopol’, and many more words that sing in my head, and I know that I am watching in this ordinary everyday London show something whose roots go deep into ancient gallantry, old sacrifices . . . ‘unhappy far-off things and battles long ago’.

As the colour comes level with me the wind pulls out a fold, and clear in the morning sun I read ‘Ypres’.

I find myself looking into the eyes of a shabby young fellow next to me.

‘Ypres !’ he says. Then softly : ‘Wipers !’

The band breaks into a cheery march, the troops change step, the crowd scatters, and, high up among the grey battlements of the Palace, Princess Cinderella gives a little satisfied pat to her hair and goes down, presumably to earth.

§ 5

As you go through the gates of the Royal Mews at Buckingham Palace a coachman in a long fawn coat takes your card of admission, you sign your name in a book, and a royal groom in a pink coat, white breeches and cockaded hat waits to show you 'all the King's horses'.

In the centre of the huge courtyard, in which State carriages parade before a great occasion, grow four tall plane trees, and near by is a hard tennis-court on which a coachman and three coachmen's wives are playing a game. There is a clatter on the cobbles. Six horses are led in, looking rather pleased, for they have just arrived at Court from Balmoral.

'Now here are carriage horses!' says your guide.

You enter the most perfect stable you have ever seen. Neatly plaited rye wisps lie on either side the passage-way like yellow fringe to the carpet of straw in each stall. The floor is dusted with red sand. Brass shines, harness shines, horses shine. This is a scene that must rejoice the heart of the Master of the King's Horse.

In the stalls are the big bay beauties which every one in London has seen high-stepping before State landaus when the King and the Queen go out. There is a clink of chains, a nuzzling at feeds, big eyes are turned in your direction. Horse-

shoes have rubber caps to prevent a slip on a wet road.

‘Those two are the pair that drew the Princess Royal’s carriage on her wedding day.’

The two big fellows stabled side by side look in one another’s stalls as if discussing their joint distinction.

‘These are riding horses.’

You are in another stable. Names are inscribed over each stall.

‘Allegro . . . Haig.’

Here is the horse that Earl Haig rode in France and afterwards presented to the King.

‘Basuto.’

A queer, light-coloured, sharp little pony that was given to the King by a native chief in Africa.

In an adjoining room is the Royal Mews Museum. Here are saddle-cloths used by King Edward and bridles for at least a dozen cavalry regiments. Here is the Prince Consort’s saddle, and a saddle used by Queen Victoria. In the harness-room are the State trappings slung on wooden racks. You admire the marvellous red morocco and gilt-embossed harness used when the great gold State coach goes through London to the opening of Parliament. This is the harness that once lay over the backs of the famous Hanoverian cream ponies that now, alas ! have been sold.

What a marvellous business is Court etiquette ! Here are sets of harness for every degree of rank. When a Buckingham Palace landau clip-clops down to Victoria to meet a king, a prince, a princess, or a president, who ever thinks that the horses have been harnessed with minute care to the exact value of the occasion ? Only on the very grandest

days do those lovely flamingo-coloured, gold-butted whips, with their snow-white lashes, take the air of town.

There is a long riding-school in the Royal Mews—grim, dark, and smelling of tan like all such places—in which princes and princesses have been taught to ease their reins over a box jump. Flags flutter from the roof.

‘This is where we make new carriage horses accustomed to street sights and sounds,’ explains the groom. ‘When we train them we beat drums in here and blow bugles and wave flags. Those banners hanging from the roof make them accustomed to going through decorated streets. When you come to consider how nervous horses are you realize what a lot our horses have to go through during ceremonial drives in London.’

Then the coronation coach. . . . They save that for the last!

It stands in a coach-house by itself, a glittering mass of wrought gilt, its huge wheels, with their outward bent spokes, the beautiful glass-house of a body swung on great leather springs. It is a gigantic coach. No one can estimate its size from watching it pass slowly down the street; it is necessary to stand on a level with it and look up. Then you realize that when an English king is driven to his coronation he must feel that he is swinging in a cradle slung between heaven and earth!

It was designed in 1762, painted by Cipriani, and five British sovereigns have gone to Westminster Abbey in it: George IV, William IV, Victoria, King Edward, and King George.

‘My,’ says an American, ‘that’s some whale of a coach. How much does it weigh?’

A L O N D O N Y E A R

'Four tons,' says the coachman.

As you look at it you remember the place it occupied in your nursery days, the very brother coach to that in which Cinderella rode to the ball. . . .

In the courtyard the King's men are still playing tennis with their wives and, near by, the King's horses stamp in their stalls ; and it seems, from washed cobbles to neat stable door, from sharp grooms' faces to bow legs, that this grey building has never heard of the motor-car.

§ 6

LITTLE heads all over London are dimly thinking how queer human beings can be, how inconsistent, how unaccountable. . . .

Eleven months of the year are sheer joy (marred by unfortunate lapses from grace when you cannot resist a bite at the vicar's juicy old cat). Generally speaking, life is tremendous fun, especially where there are children ; summer a time of walks and adventures ; winter a lazy dream before a fire. But in August, suddenly, the gods who so wisely rule your destiny abandon you to solitude. They tell you they hate doing it ; but they do it ! They explain that dogs are not allowed where they're going, or that the landlady keeps cats ! Life is just one confounded cat after another. When there is any trouble in your life you can bet that somewhere a cat's in it up to the whiskers.

You begin to feel uneasy when the chief goddess raids the box-room (where you caught a rat once and got chastised for taking it straight down to a tea-party) and fusses round, asking questions :

‘Milly, where’s your bathing costume? . . . Bill, do you want those old flannel trousers? . . . Are you children taking your tennis racquets?’

You sit around mournfully, very interested, and now and then some one pats your head with, ‘Poor old boy, it’s a shame, isn’t it?’

Then they go. Incredible! They go! In a taxicab. They kiss you and pat you and tell you that Tom, the gardener’s boy, will take you for a walk every day and give you food. As if that mattered! And the lovely, noisy house goes silent, so that you can hear the uncatchable mouse in the pantry scratching and nibbling on the other side of the door. . . . There is nothing to do but wait and wonder in that dim way of yours.

You spend quite a long time sitting by the front door with your head on one side in case the gods come back. You can’t reason ahead, and last year is vague in your mind. You are only acutely conscious that some great natural law has been violated. Each step on the path outside starts your tail whipping the floor, puts a yelp of welcome in your throat, and then . . . it’s that unpleasant postman who smells of cat! A letter flops through the letter-box. You smell it and yawn. So it goes on.

Tom comes in every day, and sits where he has no right to sit. You don’t entirely like Tom. When you were very young he twisted your tail. He reads a letter which Milly left on the mantelpiece! He even—great bones and biscuits—opens the silver box which no one but the great chief god ever touches, and puts one of those brown smoky things in his mouth. And no one will ever know! You can’t tell.

‘Come on, let’s go for a walk.’

A L O N D O N Y E A R

You go ; but it isn't the same. Neither does the food taste as it once tasted when you were happy.

The only good thing about Tom is that he leaves doors open. You creep upstairs through the silent house, rather fearful because, although there is no one there, you are not allowed to do this. A door yields to your nose. You enter a dark room. You pause, and your head goes up in the air. You smell the great chief god ! It seems so real. It seems that at any moment he might come in and say, 'Hallo, what are you doing here ?' You look around. He isn't under the bed or anywhere. . . .

In the next room you smell the great chief goddess, and you sit down among these strong ghosts of your people. You give a whimper, and want to fling back your head and howl. It really is awful ! They are here and yet they are not here ! You feel you want to jump up and down and wag your tail and wriggle sideways with your head in the carpet and roll over and portray joy in action, but there is no one to jump for, or at ; and you are as near tears as a dog can be.

Milly's room is locked, but by snuffling under the crack of the door you receive a marvellous impression of her sweet and artificially pungent personality. It is a veritable hall of memories. Frank's room is locked, too. The young god has also left much of himself behind, even to a faint scent of Pomeranian which comes from the dog of the girl he's engaged to. An objectionable, provocative scent.

In the darkness of the night there is a scratch at a window. Something bad outside sends the mane

AUGUST

up on your back as you leap like a fury with bared fangs and a deep war-cry in your throat, instinctively defensive, ready to leap into the most bloody battle for those who have left you. The noise dies, the horrid presence outside goes. You sleep.

Perhaps—if you are a very clever dog—you dream of the unforeseeable day when, quite suddenly, the doors will open and all joy will rush back into life, all gladness, all fun.

‘Down, boy, down!’ they will cry. ‘Down, boy!’

Then :

‘My dear, how thin he is ! Why, boy—you *haven’t been eating your food !*’

What does that matter now—the gods are home. . . .

SEPTEMBER

§ 1

IT is good to be in London in September when the fingers of autumn are outstretched to the trees. The little daisies of St. Michael are almost ready to crown the year with purple. Each park, each garden, each poor patch of green becomes an island of autumn in which you can feel that rich hush, as of a task well done, that falls over open country when the corn is cut and the orchards are heavy with their harvest. The moods of London are infinite. These stones are sensitive.

I deceive myself sometimes into the belief that I can smell hay at Ludgate Hill. It would not be surprising. Go up to the dome of St. Paul's on a clear day when there is a wind that blows away the smoke and you will be delighted to realize that, big as London is, she still lies in a great cup whose rim is green. You can still see green hills from St. Paul's. And from these green places there steals into town a breath of autumn to drift through the streets and meet you suddenly at the Bank, filling you with a beautiful melancholy.

In the flagged courts of the Temple the damp leaves lie flattened on the stones as if cut out of brown paper, or they sail crisply to earth to lie waiting for the first wind to pull them into a measure and leave them against walls as a rustic might forsake his exhausted partner at a country dance. Over Georgian buildings lies the Virginia creeper, its leaves beginning to suggest that they have been dipped in wine. There is a mellow stillness in the air of London that makes you think of country

places and red apples lying in a rough circle at the feet of the trees.

In the evening, when the troubled, pale sky fades into dusk and stars, have you felt in the streets of London—those hard, long, lamp-lit avenues—an autumn sadness, as though the barren earth beneath was longing for children, as though wise, sad Piccadilly found it in a stony heart to envy some quiet Kentish orchard happy with red fruit? Sometimes in September I half expect to turn out of the Strand into a lane heavy with fruit, the ghost of some ancient autumn.

Autumn is eternal, and perhaps she whispers in the stone forests of London, as she whispered in the streets of Babylon, 'Wait only a little, and you shall bear fruit again.'

It is in the parks of London that she holds her court. The Serpentine is whipped into little waves, the leaves slant down to earth, and girls with wind-blown skirts pass over the grass, heads down before a petulant, changing breeze. Old men sit on green seats quietly smoking, watching without much interest a cantering chestnut mare carrying a girl down the Row. They turn up their coat collars and cannot bring themselves to face the club—yet.

The sky pales, the brown leaves dance, a star shines. Over there beyond the rails the traffic frets. Lights are lit. Slender motor-cars glide by. The old men see in them, in a pink light, young girls and young men laughing on their way to dinner or theatre.

It is dark; and the old men sigh and prepare to go. They rise up out of their autumn dreams; and the leaves still fall. I like to think that they

have been thinking about some Argive Helen who has come back most beautifully to them in the dusk.

I may be wrong. Perhaps they only think of grouse and partridge or sit there composing a new apéritif. But—well, I don't think so. . . .

I like to give them the benefit of the doubt.

§ 2

THE family cannot afford to snatch a few hectic days at Southend or at Margate, because railway fares alone would eat up a week's wages. So London must be the playground and give them their holiday.

Mother packs a wicker basket with sandwiches, bread and cheese, and bottles of lemonade (and a supply of milk for Alfred, who has not yet joined in the general competition to eat his parents out of house and home), while father, as if revealing a secret, produces a cricket-bat and, most marvellous to behold, wickets.

When you have been accustomed to cricket with a cast-off coat as the target for your googlies, real wickets seem the last word in style and tone. The children, instinctively realizing that these things are a remarkable phenomenon in a life which contains few such rash extravagances, crowd round, handle them reverently, and feel that it is going to be a wonderful holiday.

They arrive in Hyde Park early in the day to seek out a secluded spot. This is not simple, for too many others are at the same game. However, the sharp slope upwards from the Serpentine towards the Marble Arch side of the Park affords

considerable boskiness. In fact, a Londoner of a Virgilian turn of mind could believe himself in a fit setting for a Georgic, a conviction helped out here and there by the city's equivalent of a shepherd sporting with Amaryllis in the shade. Through the ancient trees the Serpentine gleams like silver. On the road below pass horsemen and horsewomen, giving to the Cockney just that pathetic reassurance of humanity and—dare I say?—civilization which is entirely lacking in the frightening solitude of real country.

Bill, Mrs. Bill, and family establish Alfred in a place of safety on a pile of coats, from which he gazes blue-eyed, his mouth deformed by an indiarubber 'comforter', and his remarks rendered quite negligible. Then they hurl themselves into holiday with deliberate abandon. Maudie, all leg and flying hair, fields in slip, John bowls, Alice keeps wicket, Tom retires to an indefinite position in the aloof distance, father bowls, mother bats.

Mother is twenty-eight, and looks thirty-eight because, like half the women on earth, she is immolated on the altar of the next generation. If her beloved family could be chloroformed for a month and she allowed to rest in some quiet place she might look less worn-out. However, to-day she is radiantly happy, for she has father and family together in an atmosphere of gaiety. She has forgotten the man with the rent-book, the gas-meter, the eternal problem of food, and a thousand things which to her mean married life.

'Ready?' says father. He bowls an underhand lob. She makes a slash at it, turns completely round, the ball lodges in her skirt, and she begins frantically

to score runs. They stump her ! The field comes in discussing M.C.C. rules, to hold an inquest on her short life as a batsman !

‘All right ; have another go ! We won’t count that !’ says father.

They start again. Mother hits them all over Hyde Park, and looks like making a century. Suddenly there are cries of anguish from the coat dump. Alfred’s mouth resembles the entrance to a scarlet cave, his eyes are closed in the sheer enthusiasm of his sorrow, tears catch each other up on his pink cheeks. Mother drops the bat at the call of her life’s mission ! She bends over Alfred and produces a bottle. His passion ends as suddenly as it began. The game of cricket proceeds.

Through a sunny afternoon the humble London family find ease and happiness in Hyde Park.

Exhausted by the tireless demands of youth, mother and father lie on the grass and watch life going by on the path below.

‘Hyde Park !’ says father, lying flat on his stomach and watching the silver glint of the Serpentine through the trees. He says nothing else, not given to reverie or the excavation of his feelings ; but his wife understands. It was in Hyde Park they met, in Hyde Park they ‘walked out’, in Hyde Park she promised to marry him, and now Hyde Park offers to them and their children the one recreation of their hard year. . . .

Dusk falls, the dull mutter of London breaks against the green circle of trees and grass, the first star appears, the basket is packed up, the stumps drawn, and these children of London go out into the falling night well content with their holiday—to return again to-morrow !

‘It’s as good as Margit any day!’ says father softly.

‘Course it is!’ says mother with a little too much animation. ‘Why spend all that money—even if you had it?’

She looks at him with a smile, knowing that he does not believe this, and—knowing that he knows she does not believe it either!

§ 3

I LOVE to walk up Ludgate Hill on a September morning to stand before the wide sweep of the Cathedral steps watching a stolid British citizen posed like a statue, with a pigeon on his hat.

Every day of the year all manner of people place corn in their pockets and go out to make friends with the pigeons of St. Paul’s. The pigeon is a bird which has never moved me to enthusiasm, but at the same time I can appreciate how it is that certain people have a passion for these quick-nodding, iridescent birds, with their delicate mulberry-coloured feet and their expressionless eyes like spots of jet in a circle of amber. They have one great attraction. Whereas it is impossible to distinguish one rook from another, or one thrush from another, the pigeon develops such variety in colouring that, watching a flight of them, it is possible to pick out one bird and follow its movements, and even imagine that it has an individuality, is bolder, or more timid, than its companions.

Always when a crowd collects round the pigeons of St. Paul’s there comes a man who looks as though feeding stray birds is the one serious moment in his life. And, of course, many people are proud of

worse achievements. He is the Man the Birds Love, and he knows it, and is most vain about it.

The crowd regards him almost reverently, and the same crowd that would snigger if he walked down the street with a parrot or a canary on his finger, watches him become buried beneath pigeons without seeing anything to smile at. The man looks round quickly, enjoying his distinction. The birds come to him till he looks like an overworked tree. They stand on his hat, they slide, fluttering, down his arms, they perch on his shoulder with their warm little bodies against his cheek, they poise themselves with a great flutter of strong pinions on his outstretched hands and they nod in a circle at his feet, casting quick, beady looks at him.

He fills his mouth with maize and the pigeons put their beaks gently towards his teeth and take the food. Could confidence go further? Such trust in man is not exceeded in London till some one works off the gold brick on a stranger! But this trust is not betrayed; it is perhaps one of the most idyllic sights in the City. . . . St. Francis in a bowler hat.

There are girls who save crumbs from their luncheon, and young men of ragged appearance who look as though they could not afford to give anything away, old men and elderly women. You will notice how pleasant and happy they are during that intent moment of offering. When people are with children or dumb animals they reveal themselves.

Now and again a child stoops down and frightens the birds away by his desperate anxiety to draw them on, or a baby breaks loose from his mooring and staggers among the flock making vague pro-

prietary movements which indicate that in his mind he believes that he stands a chance of catching and holding these bright, coloured things. The pigeons of St. Paul's do not mind ; they just run out of his way. One thing only they fear : a sudden noise.

Their alarms are of two kinds : one a semi-fright and the other a unanimous panic. Let some one shut the door of a Ford car. That causes a semi-fright. Half the birds rise in the air, do an uncertain half-wheel, and come to earth again immediately. But—crack ! A boy has dropped a hand trolley, or an engine has back-fired, and then you see the whole flight, three or four hundred strong, rise on the very instant with a great rush of wings and wheel in ordered grace against the mottled face of St. Paul's.

As they turn their black shadows sweep across the ground ; for one second, as you look up, they are black in the air. Then they wheel, catch the sunshine, and come fluttering down again to their food. . . .

The last grain gone, the men whom the birds love walk off and become lost in the crowd, while the pigeons sit on St. Paul's and, let us hope, return thanks for all quick-lunch bars.

OCTOBER

§ 1

IT is the first of October. In the early morning a white mist lies over London ; the shroud of summer. In Essex and Kent the boys call it a mushroom mist, and go over the fields in shining, wet boots to find the choice tight ' buttons ' or the larger kind with flesh-pink gills which spring bone-dry from the wet grass. In London this white mist hangs in squares and streets. Every leaf is wet.

There is no wind and, in the hush of morning, trees in the square are as still as a scene at the bottom of the sea. The Row in Hyde Park fades into mist from which, now and then, a horseman emerges for a second, his horse's breath white on the sharp air. . . .

It is 9.30 a.m. on Blackfriars Bridge. The bridge pulses with traffic and is loud with the rattle of wheels, the jingle of harness and the sound of motor-horns. The river is a study in dark blues, the blue of cigar smoke, a lovely, subtle blue. The training-ship is silhouetted black like a ghostly galleon against the graduated background. To the left a string of tied barges is also black ; and the reflection of the Southwark side, the ragged wharves, tall chimneys, is projected, trembling, in the water.

Slowly a change comes. You are conscious that above the mist is the sun. You can see Waterloo Bridge faintly etched in blue and grey ; just a whisper that a bridge is there ; as delicate as the first image that creeps over a photographic plate in the dark room. To the right of the bridge is a white blur as if something is trying hard to shine—

the river frontage of Somersè House. The roofs and chimneys of London come to life ; the trees of the Embankment increase in number as visibility extends ; the blank finger of Cleopatra's Needle emerges.

You leave the Bridge and walk down the Embankment into a silver grey vista that extends as you advance, revealing the grey ghost of the Houses of Parliament ; Westminster Bridge ; then, behold ! the sun is shining and London comes to life ! A church clock strikes ten. . . .

Noon in Piccadilly. One white glove holds up the power of a thousand horses : it falls, and the throbbing line of traffic surges on ; the red omnibuses, in skilful masses, go their ways. The crowds sway in perpetual motion on the pavements ; the women gaze into the shop windows ; a man looks at his watch ; a girl comes to him. 'Sorry I'm late, dear.' 'Oh, that's all right !' (forgotten are the cutting things he meant to say).

Twinkling fawn-coloured stockings ; pretty faces in the crowd ; taxicabs sliding up to the kerb ; a great going-in and coming-out of shops ; and over everything the roar of wheels and the feeling that this is Piccadilly—this is Piccadilly. . . .

And dusk comes down in October with a saffron haze, and we stand on Blackfriars Bridge again. It is 7 p.m. The curve of the Embankment outlined in little lights ; the lights of the bridges are strung like a string of pearls round the dark neck of the Thames ; a golden car speeds noiselessly towards Westminster. In the sky a dull brown haze closes down on London ; above it the last glow of the sun, faintly pink, shading to pearl grey. . . . Each minute the light is drawn away. There is a red

lamp on the river. The bridges are jet black and through their arches is a shine of Thames water, faintly silver.

Whistler !

Over Charing Cross, high in the sky, is a golden glow, a glow with life in it : the lights of London.

§ 2

BUT to see the full beauty of October I go to Kew Gardens to sit on a lonely seat under a tree. And I think that among the eight millions which are London there are many longing for peace to think, for calm to face trouble or sorrow ; and here in Kew is the convalescent home for all sore souls.

Over Kew hangs the high, still serenity of October woods, mellow in a duty well fulfilled, calm in the knowledge of a resurrection. Slender trees have faded to pale yellow, some are still green, many are the colour of blood or the deeper red of wine. It is so still just now. Such a cathedral hush in the tall aisles. Not one stray breath of wind disturbs the painted pageant of the woods. Trees are repeated leaf for leaf in tranquil water, and all nature seems to be kneeling in prayer. High from the boughs of a thinning tree comes the hymn of the robin, the saddest little song I know. Nothing leads up to it. It is just a delicious phrase of concentrated melancholy which starts in its fullness and is as suddenly cut short ; a sweet requiem to a dead year.

I stay still as stone on my seat. Above me a giant oak which stands in a vast circle of its fallen leaves spreads its boughs. The rustling carpet is alive with grey squirrels, who gradually conquer an ancient

fear and play almost within touch. Acorns fall from the oak with a crisp phut! on the leaves. At each fall the little grey fellows cease their restless games and sit up to listen, their tiny front legs hanging at their grey chests, their boot-button eyes very polished, their tails never still; twitching, arching. I watch their undulating whip-lash leaps over the leaves, and I hear the crackle of their teeth against an acorn as they sit up holding the nut in their little hand-like paws, wobbling it against their mouths. At a sudden sound they are gone, and I see them for a minute spreadeagled against the rough bark of a tree and I hear them moving overhead in the safety of its boughs.

This is the time of the year for them, this time of rich brown nuts. Nature spreads a lord mayor's banquet beneath each tree for their busy hands to find.

Long avenues of soft colour, the graceful fall of a leaf, grass just touched with the faint silver of dew and a small sun, the colour of a pale yolk, hanging in a haze . . . complete stillness . . . such perfect stillness and such perfect peace.

Surely it was during autumn that man first developed a sense of beauty. Surely the first artists were born when man observed the flawless workmanship of the woods, the thin-veined leaves, the little brown polished nuts in their spiky coats, the red berries, the fruits: the perfect craftsmanship of nature.

There is a church-like hush in autumn woods, an air of thanksgiving; a solemn stillness in which it seems there is 'the Voice of the Lord God walking in the garden'.

In a dark aisle of the trees are half a dozen children

gathering chestnuts. Their high voices echo in the silence :

‘ Oh, look at this huge one ; it’s just like a little hedgehog. . . . I’ve pricked my finger ! ’

The little girls take off their hats and fill them with the green spiked nuts till they look like hats full of sea-urchins. The boys tread out the nuts with their shoes and cram their pockets. They stand ankle deep in the dead leaves, and their movements send up a rich cloud of that pungent autumnal leaf smell, the incense of the woods. . . .

And here is the drama of Kew !

In the trees are grey squirrels peering with beady eyes, venturing half-way down a trunk and scurrying back again, nervous, tail-twitching, indignant ! What right have these men-children to steal their nuts ? The blackbirds second this vote of censure. They stand in the tree-tops making a noise like bags of shaken silver. Chink-chink-chink-chink . . . they cry.

Yellow leaves fall.

The robin, the little philosopher of autumn, sitting apart, pours out his sad heart into the early morning :

‘ The leaves fall and the fruits fall and life is a very sad business ; for winter waits with its frost and its snow. . . . ’

Then he pauses, for he never finishes his song. Some day, I hope, a robin will go on and give us the last verse :

‘ The dead trees hold the fresh new leaves and the snow covers the new life, and from the cold arms of winter leaps the swift beauty of the spring. . . . ’

§ 3

ONE of those things which make London undoubtedly London happens every ninth of October just before noon.

Those who happen to be passing the Guildhall pause to watch a number of men in scarlet robes, each holding tight little posies of red and yellow chrysanthemums, walk two by two from the church of St. Lawrence Jewry into the grey old Guildhall. There are men in Court dress, legal men in brindle wigs and black gowns, elderly aldermen whose spats twinkle strangely beneath fur-trimmed, scarlet robes, the City Marshal in his splendour, the Sword-Bearer in his high fur Cap of Maintenance, the Mace-Bearer with his glittering symbol of power and, last of all, the Lord Mayor of London. As the procession enters the Guildhall, beadies in jam-puff hats and gold-laced cape coats, like Christmas supplement pictures of eighteenth-century night-watchmen, make little bobbing bows to their own particular aldermen, and fall in beside them to conduct them to the 'hustings'.

'What's it all about? . . . What's happening? . . . Whose birthday is it?' ask the crowd.

'It's Michaelmas Day,' explains a bank messenger, 'and they are going to choose a new Lord Mayor.'

'Oooh! Will they come out again?'

'Yes.'

So the crowd proves that it is a London crowd by waiting there for an hour.

This is what happens inside the Guildhall.

Centuries have rolled back. The Lord Mayor,

his scarlet sheriffs and the aldermen sit on a dais beneath the great stained window of the Guildhall. Their feet crush dried flowers—old-fashioned herbs, camomile, rosemary, sage—with which since the year of the Plague the ‘hustings’ have been strewn. On the air is the faint, sweet scent of these herbs. Facing the ‘hustings’ sit the liverymen of the companies of the City of London—the Grocers, the Stationers, the Blacksmiths, the Bowyers, the Armourers, the Mercers, the Loriners, the Patten-makers and so on. They look like an ordinary crowd of City men; they wear no badge of their citizenship. The Common Crier clears his throat and advances to the edge of the dais. He shouts in a loud voice :

‘All ye who are not of the Livery depart this hall on pain of imprisonment. Be uncovered in the hall!’

No one moves! How many are interlopers, how many are knaves not licensed to make pattens, armour, bows or horseshoes within the gates of the City? It is a dramatic moment! Assuring himself that we are all good and true liverymen of London, the Common Crier clears his throat again and continues :

‘Oyez, Oyez, Oyez! You good men of the Livery of the several companies of this City summoned to appear here this day for the election of a fit and able person to be Lord Mayor of the City for the ensuing year, draw near and give your attention. God Save the King!’

We cannot draw near, but we give our attention.

It seems to me, as the formalities are solemnly observed by the group of successful City magnates sitting above us, holding their bright posies, that I

am near that quality of mind which explains London's greatness through stormy centuries ; that tenacious clinging to tradition, that pride in ancient privileges, the jealous guarding of every letter of an ancient constitution, which has enabled London to be a kingdom within a kingdom, and to elect a man who for a year may walk before the King's son within the gates of the City.

The aldermen who have ' passed the chair ' retire. The liverymen give a great shout as names are offered to them for election ; and then, having the verdict of the Livery, the aldermen troop out to elect the new Lord Mayor of London. It may be a shadow of a former ceremony, just a pale reflection, but in that reflection lies something of London's ancient strength.

They come back.

The new Lord Mayor shows himself to the Livery, who applaud him. He promises to be a good Lord Mayor, and the Livery applaud again. Everybody then makes speeches congratulating everybody else, including a member of the cabinet who is described as ' Secretary of State for War and Grocer ' (I love that ' grocer ') ; and the Court of Common Hall is over.

Outside, the Lord Mayor-elect and the Lord Mayor sit side by side in a swaying State coach drawn by four spanking bay horses. Out of one window sticks the Sword of the City of London ; from the other peeps the Mace. Four trumpeters in jockey caps and gold tunics blow a mighty fanfare and proceed, walking slowly, before the coach between lines of Londoners, into Cheapside, and on towards the Mansion House. It is a great moment !

' Tommy rot ! ' growls a man on the kerbstone.

A L O N D O N Y E A R

I hope he is not a Londoner, for any Londoner who knows his history and sneers at the Lord Mayor should be shown the gate.

‘Rot, I call it!’ he says again loudly, but no one cares what he thinks. For in those silver trumpets, calling the girls to the windows, scaring the pigeons from Guildhall Yard, is the ancient splendid voice of our City of London.

NOVEMBER

§ 1

THE Coronation procession of the King of a Square Mile takes place, wet or fine, rain, sun, or snow, on the ninth of November.

You are passing down Cheapside towards noon. You notice, in those narrow lanes opposite Bow Church which lead to Guildhall, strange, varied assemblies. In one short street a squadron of cavalry sit their horses ; in another a company of marines or of foot guards stand easy ; a third is congested by decorated lorries gay with bunting on whose extemporized stages fair maidens symbolize the glories of Empire ; a fourth may be full of boy scouts or anti-aircraft guns ; a sixth may shelter the mounted band of the Honourable Artillery Company ; a seventh may hold cars drawn by shire stallions on which one or other of the City Livery Companies has staged the drama of its craft.

You linger in these narrow streets, conscious that the spirit of the Middle Ages has inhabited a Georgian body, for the soul of the Lord Mayor's Show is medieval while its figure is eighteenth-century : periwigged, silk-stockinged, velveted, rapiered. The decorated car on which a band of beautiful typists represent the bounties of Australia is older by several centuries than the Lord Mayor's Golden Coach !

When the great magistrates of the Middle Ages rode or rowed in state to submit their loyalty to the King, or to his justiciar, at Westminster, the

state in which they travelled was a reflection of London's importance : a sign that London alone among the cities of the realm could invest its elected ruler with the symbols of royalty and send him out, a citizen king of a square mile, to meet the anointed king of England. This old London pride was, I suppose, dead by the time of Elizabeth and soured by snobbery in the days of the Georges. For the first time in the history of London the Lord Mayor became a humorous, rather vulgar, figure lolling back on his plush cushions, full, so the rabble believed, of turtle soup, flushed, so they would have sworn, with wine.

I do not suppose that to-day any one who watches the Lord Mayor of London ride in ancient state to take the oath before His Majesty's judges is sensible of any pride in the occasion. London is perhaps too big to inspire that tribal loyalty which men feel for something that is small and in danger of being assaulted. London is to her millions a secure monster : she spreads an illusion of permanence.

Still, to me, the Lord Mayor's ' riding ' is one of the splendid sights of London. I can never abandon a rather childish gasp of delight when the big gold coach swings along on its cee-springs, for, to me, Georgian as it is, it seems to swing out from those Middle Ages when the Lord Mayor, entrenched behind charters, was the managing director of the London destiny.

There is in the Lord Mayor's Show that continuity which justifies all pageantry, making a coachman with powdered hair and the man who bears the great State Sword not anachronisms among the motor-cars but something suspiciously like family portraits come to life. . . .

Listen ! The belfries of the city churches strike out peal after peal ! Bow Bells are ringing ! They peal and they clash together in a most exciting way. The windows fill with the faces of clerks and typists. A clock strikes twelve !

The mounted policemen, four abreast, move off. The first street follows them, then the second, then the third, then the fourth, till the Bank is enjoying the pageant while Basinghall Street has not seen a sign of its tail !

Up to the great doorway of the Guildhall goes the State coach with its Cipriani panels and the six mettlesome stallions. The footmen descend and stand waiting. The famous Lord Mayor's Coachman, plump and pink, sits with his three-cornered hat on a brindle wig, holding the ribbons, holding the favoured whip, sunk, it seems, not on a coach seat so much as on a great woolsack.

Into the daylight comes the Lord Mayor of London, with the Sword borne on one side of him and the Mace on the other. He wears his velvet cap, his gold chain and his long State gown. The footmen open the encrusted gold door and let down the steps. The Lord Mayor mounts into the swaying ark, the Sword goes in after him, the Mace follows ; the plump dignitary whips up his steeds and the coach moves off, the Sword of London out of one window, the Mace out of the other and the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor reclining on the cushions like a king. The cavalry escort wheels into position before and behind the coach and the procession is complete.

' Hurrah ! ' shout the crowds with just a tinge of Georgian laughter in their voices.

But the children of London ! They look at all

this with the eyes of the Middle Ages : they alone see the Lord Mayor's Show as it should be seen ; they alone see a powerful prince out of some old fairy-tale riding in his triumph with the power of life and death in his State sword and all the might and majesty of life in his mace !

The great coloured snake winds itself through the streets of London, a shadow moving through shadows : a shadowy medieval show threading its way through the shadowy lanes which were rebuilt after the Great Fire : and in it something so splendidly London, so magnificently and blatantly Conservative ; something which seems to say, ' The past and the present are one and the future is built on both . . . behold the Lord Mayor of London in state on his way to the King's judges ! '

§ 2

JUST once a year the British nation shows its heart in public. It is Armistice Day, November 11th.

I look down on Whitehall from a window in the Home Office as a sharp, eager morning is warming towards noon. From behind the Houses of Parliament the sun, flooding Whitehall, turns the Cenotaph into a great sun-dial whose narrowing shadow is flung towards Charing Cross. The new flags move in a slight wind.

And Whitehall is silent. How strange this crowd is ; this vast, still, silent gathering on Armistice Day, waiting as if in a cathedral !

The sun floods a thousand faces, and I pick out here and there women wearing the Mons Medal, men who have put on creased khaki for to-day, old women whose decorations tell their story. They

stand looking towards that place where, centred in a square of troops, this hallowed monument rises, washed by sun.

All other crowds in this city of crowds have a voice : the Cenotaph crowd has a heart. It is the one crowd of the year absolved from curiosity, purged of the vulgarity of a crowd ; a gathering bound together by the bitter-sweetness of remembered things.

It seems that here in modern England is repeated one of those events in olden times when a whole nation, in thanksgiving or in supplication, met round its altars. Now and again the hum of London reaches us from Charing Cross ; and the clock moves on.

A gold cross, a surpliced choir, the clergy. They walk slowly to their places in the heart of the square. The grey-coated Guards, the marines, the sailors, and the Air Force stand still as granite statues.

There is no word of command, no sharp compliment of steel, no cheers from the crowd as the King, the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, and Prince Arthur of Connaught walk to the Cenotaph bearing wreaths.

They salute and stand back, waiting. The clock moves on. The Cabinet, high officers of the Navy, the Army, and the Air Force, Ambassadors and men representing the Dominions overseas, stand at their allotted places with bowed heads, waiting.

Then comes the deep note of a bell ; the sound of a gun, a sharp command and a rattle of bayonets as the troops spring to attention. In one sweeping movement the vast crowd is bareheaded, the King, his sons, his officers of State, his generals, all are bareheaded. The Two Minutes' Silence begins. . . .

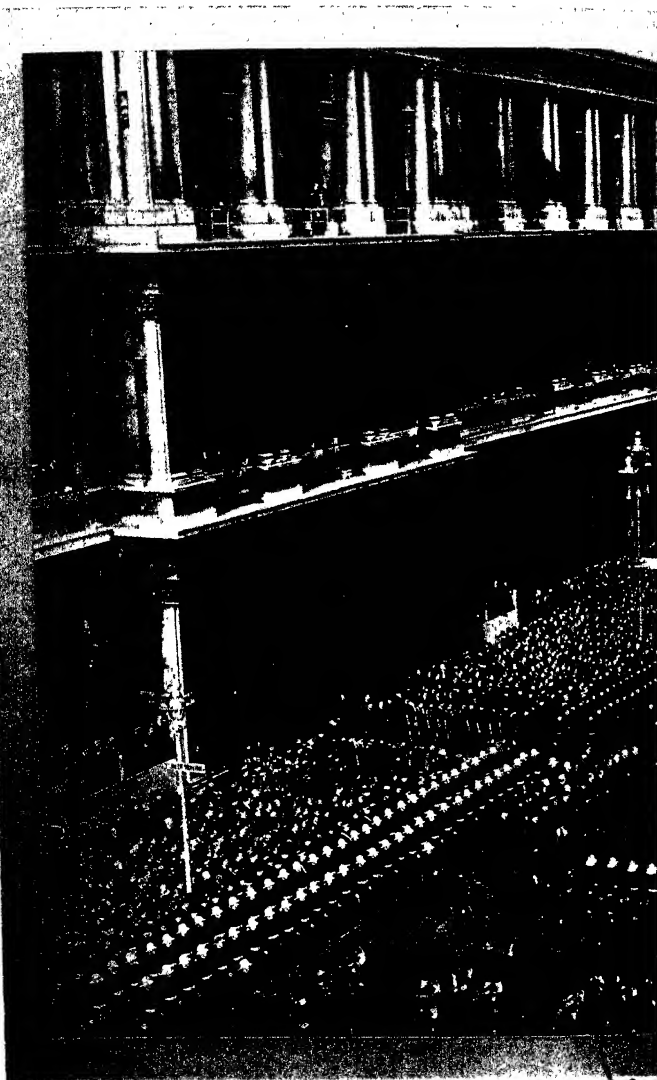
Now London is hushed. The roar from Charing Cross dies away. Only the jingle of a horse's bit breaks the silence of a people frozen in memory. Three white gulls fly over from the Thames, circle above the Cenotaph, and go. In Whitehall you *feel* the silence and the prayer ; for men and women are praying. It is not right to look. It is too sacred. The old memories well up in the heart, the old aches, the great joys, the misery, the gallantry, the laughter, and the tears.

How long two minutes can be ! How much can be remembered ! How little can a few years touch those things that go right down into the heart. I would not dare to look into a woman's mind at this time—those women with medals ! I would not care to imagine their thoughts ; but the men—ah ! in two minutes how many voices call to us, how many faces we remember, how many friendships, how many are the splendid loyalties of those 'unhappy far-off times . . . '.

The crowd relaxes. It is over. Sharp and clear sounds the Last Post, tugging at the heart with its memories of those old times, at the end of day, with night over a camp. Now the Réveillé, clear and stirring, a thing of morning memories, of dawn and new endeavour.

A moment's pause and the King salutes and goes. The square of men that represents the Empire breaks and goes ; and now, with an eager surging movement, a wave of flowers comes towards the Cenotaph, first a file of blinded men, very straight and tapping with their sticks, their poor, seared faces lifted in the sun.

So it goes on : women and men with flowers, and rising from the mass of tribute is the scarlet



ARMISTICE DAY



AY AT THE CENOTAPH

omnibus that once tore into Antwerp with its khaki crew.

‘ Old Bill ! ’

One reads the name on it with something like a catch in the throat. Bravely ‘ Old Bill ’ goes past. Behind are girls in their old war uniforms, soldiers, sailors, officers, and men marching shoulder to shoulder, and all down the line those women, old and young, with something glittering and coloured across their breasts . . .

Just once a year the British nation shows its heart in public.

§ 3

Fog.

You awaken in the morning to a melon-tinted gloom. It seems to you that sounds outside are muffled : there is a stillness over the hidden city.

‘ A London “ particular ” ! ’ they tell you.

You look through the windows and see a yellow curtain of fog. The trees in the square twenty yards off are invisible, the steps of your house fade off and vanish in the murky mystery. It is as though London, and everything in it, has sunk to the depths of a yellow sea where no wind blows.

London becomes a city of the dead. The great pulse of traffic ceases to beat ; lost stragglers wander through silent, shrouded avenues alive with eerie, cloudlike banks in the red hue of the street lamps. Men shout out into the heart of the damp darkness, ‘ Where am I ? ’ Sometimes a policeman looms up before them holding a lamp like a pin’s point of light. He guides them, as blind men are guided, across the road. More often the cries of lost people

are unanswered, for London is a desolate place of awful gloom.

Hour by hour the fog thickens. The blinded traffic attempts to crawl through the darkness. Headlights are useless. For a time there is an inferno of motor-horns. They shrill out on every hand. Omnibus drivers carry on till the kerbstones become invisible ; then they park their vehicles, and with their withdrawal falls the great silence of a London fog.

It is eerie, mysterious. The stranger in his first fog finds thrills innumerable ; the Londoner, hate it as he does, cannot deny that there is a childlike joy in the sudden dislocation of routine, the astonishing realization that the other side of the road is an adventure and a peril. . . .

You go out into the fog. Vague, half-seen shadows pass you on a cold breath. So ghosts must drift in the shadows of the underworld. Sometimes, most astonishingly, a fellow-creature appears before you with the suddenness of an apparition, every feature clear ; and in a flash—he is gone ! Murky tangerine-coloured lights crawl in the fog ; a man passes carrying a Chinese lantern, behind him are six or seven others following in his footsteps.

The wanderer is conscious of a quaint Puckish spirit in the fog. It tries to trip him up, to deceive him, to lead him on, and then to clear away and say, ‘Here you are, my friend. This is Trafalgar Square !’

It is a fog of changing, drifting patches. A hundred yards of baffling mystery, twenty yards of semi-clarity—just sufficient to give a man his bearings—and then a long tunnel of pitch black misery in which people run together in collision, walk into

buildings, and become the playthings of this yellow imp of mischief.

Piccadilly Circus, the brightest spot in London, is blotted out, the whirling maze of electric signs is invisible from the Criterion side of the circus. As you step into the deserted roadway and walk towards the fountain a faint golden glow is visible. From the fountain itself you can see that the lights of London are carrying on as usual in red and green and gold.

Common things are given a strange dramatic value. In a dense gloom you join a group of men and women who are standing on the edge of the pavement looking out into the darkness. Something has happened out there in the unfathomable mystery of the next few yards.

'What's happened?' you ask one of the ghosts.

'C'llision!' replies the ghost, hunching his shoulders and turning a pinched cold face to the blankness.

A collision! You look out and discern shadowy forms moving, titanic in the fog, like giants. Angry voices say things that prove the human origin of all these legendary shapes.

'Oughter be locked up!'

'Right on the wrong side, he was!'

'Serve 'im right! Ruddy fool!'

You see the black silhouette of a policeman holding his notebook two inches from a saffron-coloured headlight; other silhouettes blunder in the reddish moon of fog. A vast outline lurches past; and there is an outcry! The outline stops! Another one, tall as a tower, joins the group! They are like clumsy prehistoric monsters blinded, groping their way through the horrors of some natural calamity.

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They are omnibuses led by men with invisible lanterns.

The whole of London is some crazy nightmare. In the evening newspapers you read that a professor has been weighing the tons of soot and coal dust that compose a London 'particular.' He prophesies that a wind will spring up and blow away these tons of suspended particles and give London back her eyes.

And so it is ! In the morning there is a clear, cold, lemon-coloured sky ; and the sparrows chirp on the trees.

DECEMBER

§ 1

NOW is the time to see Covent Garden, that astonishing market which seems too small to provide London with fruit, flowers, and vegetables. Christmas arrives early in the month in pyramids of holly and in pagan forests of mistletoe sprinkled with cloudy, significant globes.

A pink mass of crushed holly berries lies in the road ; a clutter of carts, wagons, lorries stand chock-a-block in side streets ; men like the woods of Birnam walk covered in feathers and spruce trees and, overflowing to the pavement—glorious masses of colour—are oranges from Spain, big, yellow grape-fruit from Cuba, apples from Canada, and tangerines in silver coats.

It is 11 a.m. Half Covent Garden has finished a day's work that began before dawn, when carts trundled over Waterloo and Blackfriars bridges with the mud of country lanes over them and green things piled high. No wonder a human boy who has been decanting cabbages since dawn feels like flinging an occasional potato at people who calmly saunter through Covent Garden about noon with the shaving powder still round their ears !

All kinds of Christmas shopping is going on. Three pretty nurses from a hospital are bargaining with a rough, six-foot merchant of evergreen for sprays of laurel to decorate a ward. Delightful to watch how they demolish him, bring down his prices—all melting eye work ! They coyly approach his mistletoe. They smile and blush. He puts up a show of resistance. No ; it's less than cost price !

Impossible ! He feels himself giving way, and becomes technical in a last effort to save himself, talking of transport and the cost of labour.

There is a soft, appealing look from a pair of Irish eyes ; two grey, enchanted eyes.

‘ Oh, but think of our children in the hospital !’

He gives in !

‘ Three nice ones they are, Bill !’ he shouts as the nurses go away festooned like three ancient priestesses. ‘ I shall soon be broke at this rate. If any more come along you can have ’em !’

In the market proper, sleuths from big hotels rub shoulders with men from barrows. The sleuths, perhaps, want peaches for some expensive pale lady ; the men want boxes of dates to wheel through London.

Wholesale men go off with quantities of fruit that will find its way to the tables of millions of Londoners. Forlorn-looking trees are bought by the hundred, soon to be tricked out in a little brief beauty.

Turning a corner you meet a nun. She is carrying a basket in which dealers have dropped offerings. She is quite appropriate, this grave black and white sister, in a place that used to be Convent Garden.

You look round at the clamour and the congestion. Two carters are quarrelling over a right of way. It is strange to know that once salads were cut here for the table of the Abbot of Westminster. It is difficult to picture men stooping over the beds in a quiet garden with Charing Cross a suburb and London far away on Ludgate Hill !

Strange, too, to realize that in all the change and flux of time the convent garden has not forgotten fruit and green things and flowers.

§ 2

EVERY year just before Christmas, you go to the Cattle Show at Islington to do a little bull-prodding, to discuss life with the cowmen of many a shire and to derive comfort from the contentment of vast pigs with lovely Burne-Jones hair who slumber on the eve of extinction without one dream of sage or apple.

The Horse Show at Olympia during the 'season' attracts men and women who have never set foot in stirrups, but the Cattle Show at Islington attracts only the experts. Here you may see all those members of the aristocracy who have not yet been taxed off their land leaning over stalls digging cows in the ribs. Here gather the farmers from north, south, east, and west; here the cowmen, the pigmen, and the shepherds, from Perthshire downwards, sit on bales of fodder smoking and talking about—pigs and cows and sheep.

This show was the last act of the eighteenth century in London. It has been held since 1799. Such a characteristic departure of a century which loved to play at shepherds!

I went into a friendly smell of disinfectant, farmyard and cigars. The great steers and heifers lay cumbersomely in long lines, nibbling mangel-wurzels and regarding the world with eyes full of a mild, inexhaustible patience. I saw a woman, whom Whitaker would describe as 'born in the degree of countess', leaning over a stall and feeling the sirloin of a Red Poll. A peer, who owns one of the finest farms in Norfolk, was asking a sheep farmer if he was 'much troubled with foot rot'; a Scottish cattle breeder was explaining to a ladylike young man (a

most unlikely looking farmer) that 'ye must hae a coo right on its legs'; a truth which he illustrated by making one of his Aberdeen Angus rise heavily and, as Maupassant might have put it, balance herself on her haunches.

All part of an older, happier world. . . .

The Cockney, so long divorced from the sanity of the countryside, smiles at the Cattle Show; to him it is one of London's most delightful jokes. The tradition is that the rustics pile in from all the shires and stand at nights 'fair mazed' by the epileptic lights of Piccadilly. He believes that these simple folk discuss the wonder of London in many an outlandish tongue. The truth is, of course, that straws are no longer worn in the mouth of rural England; and the countryman has a veiled contempt for London.

'Great noisy place,' he says. 'Thank goodness on Friday I'm going home where you can hear a man talk. No wonder London people seem mostly daft, living like a pack of old mouldy-warps under the ground or scatterin' across the road in front of motor-cars like a lot of rabbits. . . .'

That's how he thinks of us.

I enjoy the cattle at these shows. The great Highland steers, like the pictures in Bloomsbury boarding houses, mops of shaggy tawny hair in their eyes; the same colour that you see on the heads of Scottish railway porters.

The Lincoln Reds are a peculiar brown seen only among human beings on the heads of middle-aged French actresses. It is a most suspicious shade of brown: only a Lincoln Red would be given the credit for having been born like that. The cow-herds always part the hair down the back of a

Lincoln Red and marcel-wave the creature till its body is one mass of small red ripples.

The Devons are the lovely rust-red colour of the fields round Newton Abbot ; and there are hornless Aberdeen Angus, fat but rather chic beasts in black satin coats with a great bump on their foreheads ; they are neat animals, rather like the Egyptian Apis.

Curious how the old legend lingers in cities that the countryman is suffering from arrested mental development.

In the machinery section are examples of the modern young English farmer, real yeomen, tough as their fathers, but quite a different type. They have been educated in village schools ; they have read more than their fathers have read, some of them saw the world during the war, and all of them, no matter how remote from cities and towns, have the wireless. They walked round the strange pale blue and scarlet machinery designed in recent years to bring the farm up to date, discussing the virtues of a machine that is a pneumatic milkmaid, and the labour-saving characteristics of a patent cutter and reaper.

A young man in boots and leggings discussed with me small holdings, Mr. Lloyd George's land policy, the evil of the break-up of old estates, the power of valve sets, and the intelligence of town versus country :

'In towns you all run like sheep through the gap in the hedge,' he said. 'You all follow the other fellow's opinion, but in the country we have to think things out for ourselves, mostly. I don't say we're smart, but we're not the fools you think us. . . .'

A L O N D O N Y E A R

A good 'yokel' this ! If rural England is ever going to revive it is under such hands.

And now about pigs : fat pink pigs with heaving sides. I love pigs and their little business-like eyes. The bliss in which they live, so removed from the tortures of reflection, so content to take the cash and let the credit go. . . . On second thoughts I dare not write about pigs. I have no room in which to express my admiration.

§ 3

T I M E S change. . . .

It was once possible to climb the bleak stairs of a building just off Shaftesbury Avenue and find, in December, fairies of all sizes, from Pease-Blossom upwards. Now the room in which they glittered, turning this way and that in their stiff muslin skirts, pirouetting on straight long legs, is full of elderly men learning to dance. It is very sad.

Nothing was prettier in the London year than these fairies standing in a bunch tying little white satin bows on one another's wrists, adjusting silver stars on one another's foreheads, talking all the time in voices which, in a most homely and delightful way, linked Brixton and Walthamstow with the realm of Oberon. A man would hit a piano suddenly and say : ' Now, girls ! ' The fairies would cease chattering, form a line, and to the sound of a thin, sticky tune leap upwards in unison, as if catching invisible butterflies.

Sometimes you would enjoy the unusual privilege of meeting the mothers of fairies—incredible sight—often fat women smelling faintly of cloves. They

used to sit about on wickerwork baskets and refer to a fairy as 'Our Lizzie'. Most surprising of all was the knowledge that many of these faded women had once been fairies too! One's eye swept their massive façades, trying hard to excavate the lost Columbine.

'Where are they all?' I asked the man who used to send this white wave of beauty all over the country at Christmas.

'Oh, the public is too sophisticated for that sort of thing now,' he said. 'Pantomime fairies are getting scarcer and scarcer. I haven't turned out one fairy ballet this year. Not one fairy queen. Even provincial pantomimes are becoming nothing else but revues disguised under the old names of *Cinderella* and *Aladdin*. They are rehearsing a children's play over in Piccadilly, but that's a different kind of thing. . . .'

'Do you remember that delightful child,' I said, 'who played "Alice in Wonderland" a few years ago, and had no idea that she was earning fifty pounds a week?'

'I should think I do! When I gave her a £50 note in an envelope she said: "It isn't real!" and left it lying about the room. It was banked for her, and the next week when she opened her envelope she took out the note and said: "It's the same one!"'

I got up and shut the door.

'Um! It's not so interesting now. I'll go over and look at the rehearsal.'

On the top floor of a high room overlooking Piccadilly I found a crowd of fifty young women and children.

Up there, cut off from the excitement of London,

these people were banded together in the confusing conspiracy of rehearsal. The ballet had discarded its skirts and was drifting about the room, long legged, doing little steps and kicks in corners. The chorus had just come in from the street, in coats and hats, and stood with its attaché-cases in a group. Among them I found the twin daughters of a peer. A dozen little girls of about ten or twelve years of age sat together with that air of assurance which comes naturally to even the youngest actresses.

The 'leading lady' was sitting on a window-sill kicking a pair of thin legs in white socks. She is thirteen years of age, goes to school every day, and rehearses in her spare time. Her parents live in a suburb and, having no connexion with the theatre, are quite astonished to have brought an actress into the world.

'I learn my part in the bus from Forest Gate,' she said, in a shy, breathless voice.

'Now, darlings!' cried the producer. 'Act one, scene two!'

There was some activity. In a little place cleared on the floor two or three people, detached from the main body, began speaking together. . . .

The utter dreariness of rehearsals, even when the producer uses the word 'darling'! You must be sadly stage-struck to find anything exciting in them. They are heroic, I admit! The infinite patience, the wonderful enthusiasm lavished on any theatrical show is something the public seldom considers. To be stopped every few lines by a hand banging on a piano, to go over the same lines a hundred times, would drive most of us mad in a night.

The old pantomime rehearsals were good fun.

They were, I think, jollier than these more sophisticated modern shows. There was something magic about them. There came a time when an enchanter seemed to have waved his wand over them and all the old characters came to life : the demon king, no longer a pale young man in badly creased trousers, turned into a real devil with a green face ; the fairy queen, no longer an uninteresting young woman in a brown jumper, floated on air in white draperies ; and the fairies . . . no words can describe the white scurry of the fairies in their stiff-from-the-waist spangles. . . .

The play proceeded. The long-legged ballet took the floor. The chorus sang. The lights of Piccadilly flickered ; the London crowds went on below, unconscious of the tremendous effort to please going on up here and in several other parts of London where Boxing Day looms with threatening import. It was very festive ; it could not have been happening at any other time of year.

The rehearsal ended. A few mothers arrived to take their young home ; not the hearty old mothers of fairies, but circumspect suburban wives. The ballet put on its skirts. The players melted away chattering, still speaking their lines, still practising dance-steps towards the lift ; and so out into the lights of Piccadilly.

§ 4

CHRISTMAS DAY in London.

A hush more peculiar, more significant and deeper than any hush of the year, falls over London. But it is merely a superficial hush. Actually it is one of the noisiest days in the whole year. Early

A L O N D O N Y E A R

in the morning the rigid and apparently silent streets are loud with the blowing of tin trumpets, the hooting of toy horns, the beating of kettle-drums, the winding of springs and the explosion of crackers. To the homeless wanderer, however, to whom all hearts turn on this day, London must appear to be wrapped in a self-contained silence. Self-contained it certainly is, for this is the only day in the year on which London has no public life.

The big hotels, in order to keep their doors open, must transform themselves into children's parties and reproduce on an embarrassing and expensive scale the atmosphere that exists so simply and so beautifully in millions of little homes. Sometimes young reporters, torn from the bosoms of their families, are sent out on a cold unhappy tour of London on Christmas Day. And they all tell the same story. Bald old men, who ought to know better, are wearing paper caps in the Ritz. The Chelsea Pensioners are eating plum pudding. Patients in hospitals lie in garlanded wards. The homeless are herded in an atmosphere which is described as 'jolly'. That is all that we have ever been able to extract from the most earnest and willing of explorers.

But I can never understand why the earnest young reporter takes the trouble to explore London in search of Christmas. He would do far better if he just stood outside the nearest house and described the lit interior seen through a gap in the curtains : the holly, the mistletoe, the bright children's faces, the older faces on which Christmas has painted a brief, exceptional carelessness.

It is a day that never changes. It is the one day in the whole year in which London, splitting up into

millions of self-contained family groups, is at peace with itself.

§ 5

THERE is nothing more pathetic in London than the place in the General Post Office where all the presents that did not arrive in time for Christmas lie in awful chaos.

A walk through this hospital for injured gifts is heartrending. Nothing on earth can look more woebegone than a lost plum pudding from Australia, unless perhaps half an iced cake from Toronto. Every year thousands of plum puddings, cakes, turkeys, hares, toys, and incredible gifts which are none of these, lose labels and wrappings and end up in the G.P.O. Christmas hospital under the eye of an official who is a compromise between a detective and a first-class restorer.

See him examine each mince-pie for some mark of identification. Each plum pudding that comes to him naked and in a state of nervous collapse is tenderly looked over, prodded, and patted into shape, and all the time this patient man hopes against hope that some portion of its label still adheres to it or lies buried in its depths in order that he may justify his existence and send it on its way.

How his face lights up when a plateful of ruin is brought to him with an address in Upper Tooting sticking to it. Watch him take a sponge, wash pudding from the label, pat the remarkable mass into a rough dome shape, stick a bit of holly in it with a triumphant gesture and dispatch it to the department where such tragedies are rewrapped and readdressed.

It is no uncommon thing to see an official walk

down a room as large as the Crystal Palace with the lid of a mince-pie. He is trying to find the other half of it! Every lost Christmas present is treated with reverence. A rabbit with nothing on it except 'Love from auntie' is enough to make six stern Post Office officials shake their heads in sorrow.

How marvellous are the things that come to the postal hospital. Lying together are lost turkeys, geese, apples, oranges, bird-cages, pairs of trousers, petticoats, bags of nuts and astonishing omelettes caused by the sudden fusion of puddings, cakes, and mince-pies, with a top-dressing of Brazil nuts.

You cannot fail to observe an overcoat on which has accumulated a kind of plaster composed of Christmas puddings and crushed oranges. By far the most dramatic patient in the hospital is a silk hat of considerable experience which advertises the fact that it contained eggs almost as ancient as itself. A smell like slow music surrounds it. Officials hasten past it with averted eyes.

Who, you wonder, escaped receiving this on Christmas morning?

'What on earth do you do with lost presents?' you ask an official, who is thoughtfully excavating a mince-pie from a gold dance-slipper.

'We do all we can to trace the owner,' he replies, 'but if it is impossible—and just have a look round you!—we sell the articles. Perishable goods are sold almost as soon as we give up hope of identifying the person who has sent them or the person who should receive them.'

'What incredible things people send through the post at Christmas time!'

'You're right. Nothing surprises us. Just look at this!'

He parts a brown-paper wrapping and reveals two pounds of sausages and a pair of glass eyes. Nothing on them but 'All the best. Love. Wilfrid.'

Pathos, too, is to be met with in this home of lost parcels. Presents made by children in all parts of the world, little gifts of no value, but precious because of the care and pains taken in their manufacture, lie strewn over the trestle tables.

What sorrow the sight of this misdirected generosity would cause in hundreds of homes where people wait for the letter of thanks which never comes. . . .

§ 6

So a London Year is over.

The last seconds of New Year's Eve expire over a London made thoughtful by the mystery of the future. Round St. Paul's Cathedral waits a great crowd which convention claims as Scottish. The notes of Big Ben shake themselves over waiting London. The year is dead, the year with all its joys and sorrows, its crowded memories of good and bad. Boys run through the dark streets crying :

'New Year's in !'

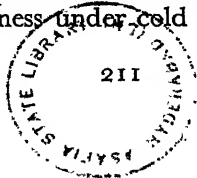
They run on in the night like heralds of good news.

Men lift their glasses thoughtfully, some to the past, others to the future :

'A happy new year !' they say.

And over London is a sense of something untrodden like the first snow, a new division of Time on which events have made no mark.

And the new road, on which so many have made their annual appointment with Virtue, lies ahead in terrifying emptiness under cold stars.



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